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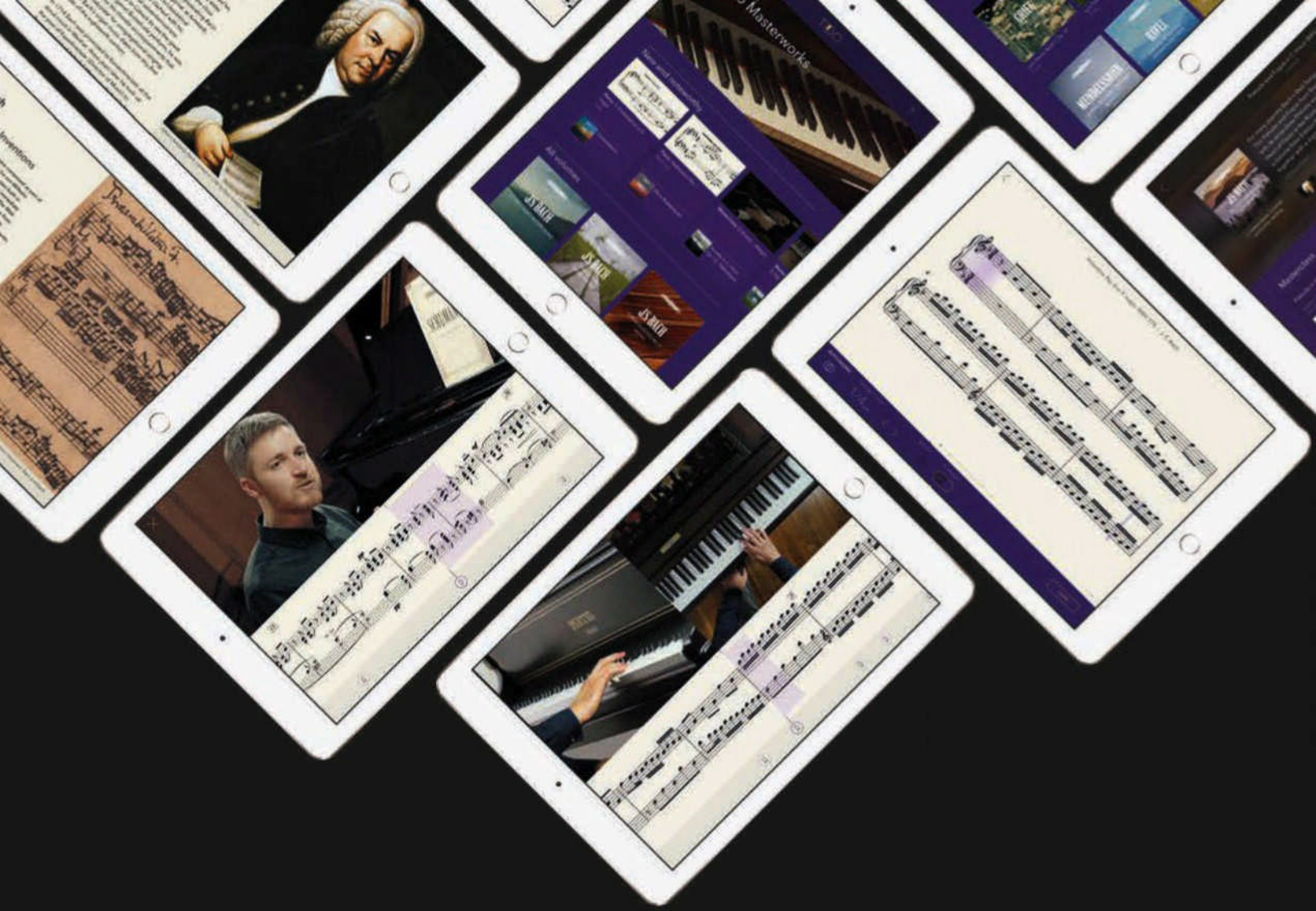
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A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

JS Bach

Fantasia and Fugue, BWV542.
Italian Concerto, BWV971 (arr Houlihan).
Passacaglia and Fugue, BWV582.
Prelude and Fugue, BWV544.
Toccata, Adagio and Fugue, BWV564.
Trio Sonata, BWV530
Christopher Houlihan *org*
Azica Ⓕ ACD71314 (80' • DDD)
Played on the Austin Organ, Op 2536, of The Trinity College Chapel, Hartford, CT



Christopher Houlihan commences BWV542's Fantasia with a delightful introductory flourish, and characterises the rippling fireworks and introspective interludes with strikingly different yet compelling timbral contrasts, topping things off with a brisk and fluent fugue. The *Italian Concerto*'s first two movements work surprisingly well on the organ in Houlihan's arrangement. He transforms the implied pedal points in the harpsichord score into real ones, although Bach's indicated distinctions between solo and *tutti* passages don't consistently come across. However, the finale's crackling energy sinks under the organ's sonorous weight. So does the climax of the Fugue in B minor, BWV544, where the massive registrations contrast with the relatively transparent woodwind-like stops prevailing throughout the Prelude.

On the other hand, Houlihan's registral diversity enlivens and clarifies the lucid and excellently articulated contrapuntal interplay in all three movements of the G major Trio Sonata. His lithe tempos and incisive inner rhythm stand out in the C major Toccata and Fugue, BWV564, not to mention a central *Adagio* that emerges like an aria, as opposed to the blobby, interminable dirge that I've heard from certain famous Bach organists. If Houlihan's C minor Passacaglia and Fugue misses some of the kinetic sweep and cumulative grandeur that Marie-Claire Alain and Anthony Newman have brought to it, the numerous contrasts in tone colour and dynamics not only add textural variety but also help to illuminate the music's structure without labouring the point.

The engineering strikes a judicious balance between clear instrumental definition and preserving something of the chapel's natural resonance. It may not be politically correct in 2017 to present Bach's organ music on an American model instrument whose electro-pneumatic action and wide range of dynamics and registrations are far removed from the composer's time. Yet when you reckon with a passionate and intelligently virtuoso musician such as Christopher Houlihan manning the Trinity College Chapel Organ in Hartford, Connecticut, who cares? **Jed Distler**

J Hall

'Love's Signature'
O Mistress Mine[a]. Propriety[b].
Syllables of Velvet, Sentences of Plush[b]
[b]**Susan Narucki** *sop* [a]**Darryl Taylor** *counterten*
[b]**Donald Berman**, [a]**Juliana Hall** *pf*
MSR Classics Ⓕ MS1603 (71' • DDD • T)

GRAMOPHONE *talks to...*

Donald Nally

The conductor of the choir The Crossing discusses their latest project, 'Seven Responses'



What inspired this project?
I am interested in how the people of different eras speak to each other over time, and how earlier art influences later generations. I also often explore in art how we experience the pain and suffering of others. Buxtehude's *Membra Jesu nostri* does that, drawing on a medieval poem and biblical verses and considering the suffering of Christ on the Cross, and what Christians believe this set in motion. Because Buxtehude's work is in seven short cantatas, each addressing a limb of Jesus on the cross, it was the perfect starting point for gathering contemporary perspectives on the suffering of others. So we commissioned seven new works that could sit alongside the Buxtehude in performance.

How did you choose the seven composers?
We wanted a wide range of musical styles as well as musical heritages; I carefully matched each composer to the text and music of the Buxtehude 'limb' that I felt would bring out something interesting and unique. For example, the heart went to an 82-year-old Danish composer often working in a minimal language; the feet went to an edgy American composer who often makes bold gestures – good for the opening response.

Do these new works need each other?
Not at all. They have already become independent, with several performances of Caroline Shaw's work and at least one each of many of the others – all without the Buxtehude.

Are there unique challenges in performing new music?
I suppose, but this is what we do every day. The Crossing exists to commission and sing new music and so the singers we attract are really into it and work hard to figure out exactly what composers want of them. The range and stamina required can be challenging, but this is fun too!

PHOTOGRAPHY: BECKY OEHLERS

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Giancarlo Guerrero conducts the Nashville Symphony Orchestra in three works by Jennifer Higdon



The American composer Juliana Hall has devoted herself to the art song for nearly three decades. Her sensitivity to words is on impressive display on 'Love's Signature', which features settings of texts by Shakespeare, letters by Emily Dickinson and poems by Marianne Moore. In their first recordings, these songs show Hall to be a composer who savours lyrical lines and harmonies peppered with gentle spices.

The most recent collection, *O Mistress Mine* (2016), comprises a dozen songs set to famous passages from Shakespeare plays. Hall uses musical gestures to heighten the meaning of the words. She is especially effective in a luminous take on 'Who is Silvia?' and a warm account of 'Lawn as white as driven snow'. The cycle receives fresh performances by countertenor Darryl Taylor and the composer as pianist.

Hall rises to an entirely different set of challenges setting seven Dickinson songs to music in *Syllables of Velvet, Sentences of Plush* (1989), the title derived from a missive to a cousin. Dickinson's words come across with crystalline clarity in Hall's tender incarnations, which capture both the genial and witty sides of this most versatile of American poets. The five songs in *Propriety* (1992) focus on the classical music world. Moore pays tribute to various aspects of the art, even celebrating the survival of a stellar venue to rousing and fanciful effect in 'Carnegie Hall: Rescued'. Soprano Susan Narucki and pianist Donald Berman illuminate the varied pleasures in the Dickinson and Moore cycles.

Donald Rosenberg

Higdon

Oboe Concerto[a]. Viola Concerto[b]. All Things Majestic[c]

[a]**James Button** *ob* [b]**Roberto Díaz** *va* **Nashville Symphony Orchestra / Giancarlo Guerrero**

Naxos American Classics Ⓜ 8 559823 (63' • DDD)

Recorded live at Laura Turner Concert Hall, Nashville, TN, [a]January 7-9 and [bc]March 25-26, 2016



The orchestra is an enormous canvas to which Jennifer Higdon applies subtle and bold colours. Her ability to use instruments in a spectrum of sonic and expressive capacities is vividly apparent in the three works on this new disc featuring the Nashville Symphony under music director Giancarlo Guerrero.

The most recent piece is the Viola Concerto (2014), three movements of deftly gauged, cheeky and often haunting material that gives the soloist numerous opportunities to soar and engage in vibrant conversation with other instruments and sections. Keeping an orchestra in balance with the viola is no mean trick but there's never a moment when Higdon allows the large forces to conceal the protagonist. The work was written for Roberto Díaz, former principal viola of the Philadelphia Orchestra and current director of the Curtis Institute of Music, who is as mellifluous and charismatic a soloist as could be imagined.

Higdon's Oboe Concerto (2005) is in one extended movement that emphasises the oboe's knack for spinning long, lyrical phrases and scampering with ease. It is a piece of shimmering beauty, which James Button, the Nashville Symphony's principal oboe, plays with elegant mastery.

The Grand Tetons are the inspiration behind *All Things Majestic* (2011), whose four movements paint portraits of thrilling landscapes. Higdon uses the full resources of the orchestra to convey the splendour of mountains, motion of bodies of water and wonders of other natural phenomena. Guerrero guides his ensemble through a performance in which both details and arching statements are set forth to resplendent effect. **Donald Rosenberg**

PHOTOGRAPHY: BILL STEBER/NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

AARON COPLAND

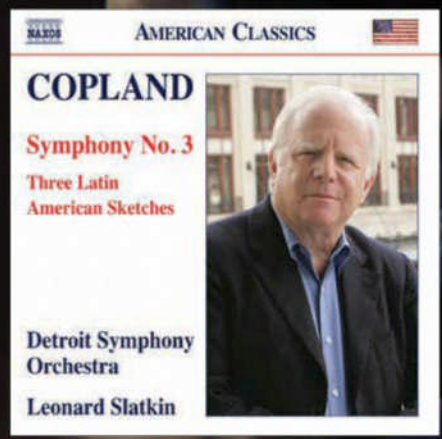
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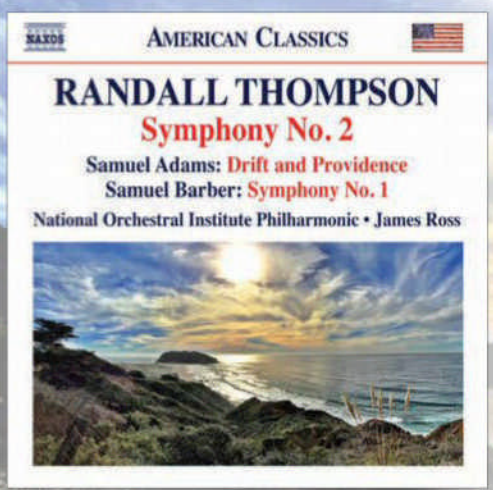
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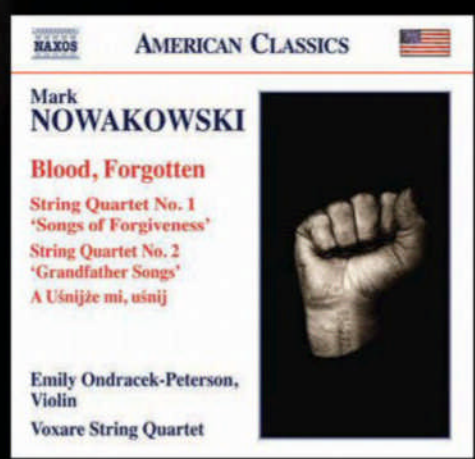
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Lomon

Esquisses[a]. Five Ceremonal Masks[a/b]. Shadowing Piano Quartet[c]. Sunflower Variations[a]
[c]**Katherine Winterstein** *vn* [c]**Scott Woolweaver** *va* [c]**Patrick Owen** *vc* [a]**Eileen Hutchins,** [b]**Ruth Lomon** *pf*
Navona Ⓕ NV6080 (67' • DDD)
[b]Recorded live 1984



Ruth Lomon (*b*1930) is Canadian-born and, after studying at the Conservatoire de Québec and McGill University, continued at the New England Conservatory and in Europe with Lutosławski and Dutilleux. She is best known for her Holocaust-inspired *Songs of Remembrance* and oratorio *Testimony of Witnesses*, as well as her orchestration of Rebecca Clarke's Viola Sonata (A/16).

For more than 60 years Lomon has lived in New Mexico, fascinated by the rituals of the local Native American tribes, an interest that has made its way into a number of her works. *Five Ceremonial Masks* (1980), the earliest item here, is one such, each of its five movements taking one of the buckskin masks used in the Night Chant of the Yeibichai people (the composer's photograph of these is in the booklet). The result is an Impressionistic suite, evoking Native American shamanism and mysticism with real charm in Eileen Hutchins's polished performance. Compare that, though, with the visceral impact of the composer's live account from 1984, included as a bonus.

The programme opens with *Sunflower Variations* (2009), written for Eileen Hutchins, who premiered it in 2010. It opens disarmingly simply but moves inexorably into different, rather Ivesian territory. There is a distinct feeling of New England transcendentalism – not surprising as Lomon has, since 1998, been Composer-in-Residence at the Women's Research Center of Brandeis University, Boston. There is something of this atmosphere, too, in the three *Esquisses* (1992), and a more robust New Mexican character in the piano quartet *Shadowing* (1995). Excellent performances and fine sound. **Guy Rickards**

Reale

'CME Presents Piano Celebration, Vol 2'
Chorales II[a]. CPE[b]. Drowsey Maggie[c]. Little Screamers[d]. Minuet in G Whiz[b]. Serge P[e]. Watchman, Tell Us of the Night: Fanfare[f]. World of a Bengal Child[g]
[acd]**Carl Patrick Bolleia,** [def]**Patricio Molina,** [bf]**Min Kwon,** [aefg]**Enriquetta Somarriba,** [bcfg]**Jiayan Sun** *pf/pfs*
MSR Classics Ⓕ MS1612 (69' • DDD)



Here's a portion of what the American composer Paul Reale states in the notes about his works for two pianos and piano four hands: 'The music on this recording uses the identity confusion concept as a structural and aesthetic device…' But is anyone really confused while listening to these captivating creations? Yes, you can discern a beloved theme here and familiar soundscape there, but Reale's affectionate tweaks and twists result in pieces that enchant the ear on their own creative terms.

The eight pieces pay affecting tribute to musicians ranging from the Chieftains and Prokofiev to CPE Bach, Ravi Shankar, Beethoven and, well, on and on. Everything has a sparkling sonic personality, as if Reale had probed the sources closely and extracted as much newly minted material as possible within short time spans.

The work titled simply *CPE* – for two pianos – is among the most beguiling, its various journeys around the composer's music venturing into unknown, reminiscent and rousing territories. A similarly inventive score, *Serge P*, finds two pianos spinning vibrant variations on Prokofiev's Sonata for two violins, Op 56, while altering the original sufficiently enough to assume its own suave and not at all confused identity.

Equally delightful are the remaining scores, including the *Minuet in G Whiz*, *Little Screamers* (replete with faintly recognisable circus music), and *Watchman, Tell Us of the Night: Fanfare* for two pianos eight hands. The five pianists who alternate and collaborate on Reale's pieces give handsome performances. **Donald Rosenberg**

Turina

'The Complete Violin Sonatas and Select Violin Works'
Violin Sonatas – No 1, Op 51; No 2, 'Sonata española', Op 82; Sonata española (1908). La oración del torero, Op 34 (arr Heifetz). Homenaje a Navarra, Op 102
Betül Soykan *vn* **Anatoly Sheludyakov** *pf*
Centaur Ⓕ CRC3463 (64' • DDD)



Turina's two numbered violin sonatas date from 1929 and 1933-34, either side – by a couple of years – of his 50th birthday. The First is to all intents and purposes a sonatina, its three compact movements a 'sonata form almost without development', an Aria and a Rondo. Its lively and characterful music is overshadowed by the altogether more involving Second and by the much earlier *Sonata española* (1908), which Turina withdrew after a couple of performances as a 'complete mistake'. It isn't.

Turina's imposing suite *El poema de una sanluqueña* (1924) – of which there is only one other available recording currently – would not quite fit on the disc but it is a shame the excellent *Variaciones clásicas* (1932) – perhaps a study for the Second Sonata's opening theme-and-variations – was omitted, and we have instead Heifetz's rather ordinary transcription of *La oración del torero*. The late *Homenaje a Navarra* (1945), a brief Sarasate-based fantasia, concludes the disc, serving as an encore to the main programme, perhaps.

Betül Soykan is currently an assistant professor of violin at Wichita State University but gained her doctorate in Georgia (USA) with a dissertation on the Turina sonatas and 'selected violin works'. Her knowledge and understanding of the music is clear in every bar and she has a most sympathetic accompanist in Anatoly Sheludyakov. Soykan's intonation at times is rather edgy, especially in the early *Sonata española* and the Heifetz, so overall this does not displace David Peralta Alegre and Aná Sanchez Donate (Verso, 8/07), still available as download only. Centaur's sound is good, though the players seem a little lost in the acoustic of Georgia University's Ramsey Concert Hall. **Guy Rickards**

'Dream Catchers'

'Masters in Miniature'
Beethoven Six Bagatelles, Op 126 **Debussy** Images, Book 2 **Ravel** Valses nobles et sentimentales **Schubert** Four Impromptus, D935 **Schumann** Carnaval, Op 9
Julia Siciliano *pf*
Blue Griffin Ⓜ ② BGR381 (113' • DDD)



This release's 'masters in miniature' subtext is a tad deceptive. The brief movements encompassing Schumann's *Carnaval* and Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, for instance, are seldom aired apart from their respective larger contexts, while the first and third of Schubert's D935 Impromptus aren't exactly quickies. What matters more are Julia Siciliano's fine technique and natural musicality, even



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if some performances succeed more than others.

Her tempo fluctuations in the first and fifth of Beethoven's Op 126 Bagatelles convey organic ebb and flow, while Nos 2 and 4 are suave on the surface yet somehow communicate the edginess of Beethoven's sudden dynamic shifts. Compared to the ardency and diversity of character distinguishing some of the catalogue's most memorable Schumann *Carnaval* interpretations (Nelson Freire's recent version, for example), Siciliano often sounds inhibited, despite her keen attention to accents and imaginative touches of rubato. Still, there are felicitous moments. For example, 'Pierrot' is subject to the kind of tricky voicings that Alfred Cortot made famous, the right hand ever so slightly and deliciously lags behind the left hand at certain points in the 'Valse allemande', and 'Aveu' ambles out on a wistful stroll. Siciliano also plays the 'forbidden' 'Sphinxes' very straight; no Rachmaninov bass rumbles or Herbert Schuch 'Schumann meets John Cage' piano preparations.

Siciliano binds together Schubert's opening F minor Impromptu with forthright narrative flow, and similarly animates the often deified and dragged-out one in A flat. While her smooth, sparely pedalled *legato* touch and controlled freedom hold interest in the B flat Theme and Variations, somehow the elaborate runs and tracery don't take full wing, in contrast, say, to Horowitz's unfettered poetry. No 4's off-beat accents are all in place, yet the phrases transpire in square, predictable patterns: microphone shyness, perhaps?

The poised and polished Ravel performance only becomes truly memorable in the final two movements, where Siciliano's tone gains shimmer and translucency. Lastly, the pianist's masterful delicacy, harmonic motion and timing in 'Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut' take the prize over her relatively matter-of-fact renditions of the other two pieces in Debussy's *Images* Book 2. Occasional thumps and studio noises aside, the vibrant and full-bodied sound is up to Blue Griffin's high standards for piano reproduction. **Jed Distler**

'Seven Responses'

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen Ad cor **Little** dress in magic amulets, dark from My feet **Ratniece** My soul will sink within me **Shaw** To the Hands **Spratlan** Common Ground **Thomalla** I come near you **Thorvaldsdóttir** Ad genua/To the knees **The Crossing; International Contemporary Ensemble / Donald Nally**
Innova Ⓑ ② INNOVA912 (106' • DDD • T)



'Poised and polished': Julia Siciliano plays Beethoven, Debussy, Ravel, Schubert and Schumann



These seven chamber cantatas were commissioned by the innovative chamber chorus The Crossing to go with a 2016 concert performance of Buxtehude's *Membra Jesu nostri patientis sanctissima* (1680), a cycle of seven cantatas each of which takes a part of Christ's anatomy as its subject. Each of the seven present-day composers was assigned one of the 'membra' (feet, knees, hands, side, breast, heart, head) as their point of departure to create a musical response to Buxtehude's paean to Christ's agony on the Cross but substituting a contemporary area of pain.

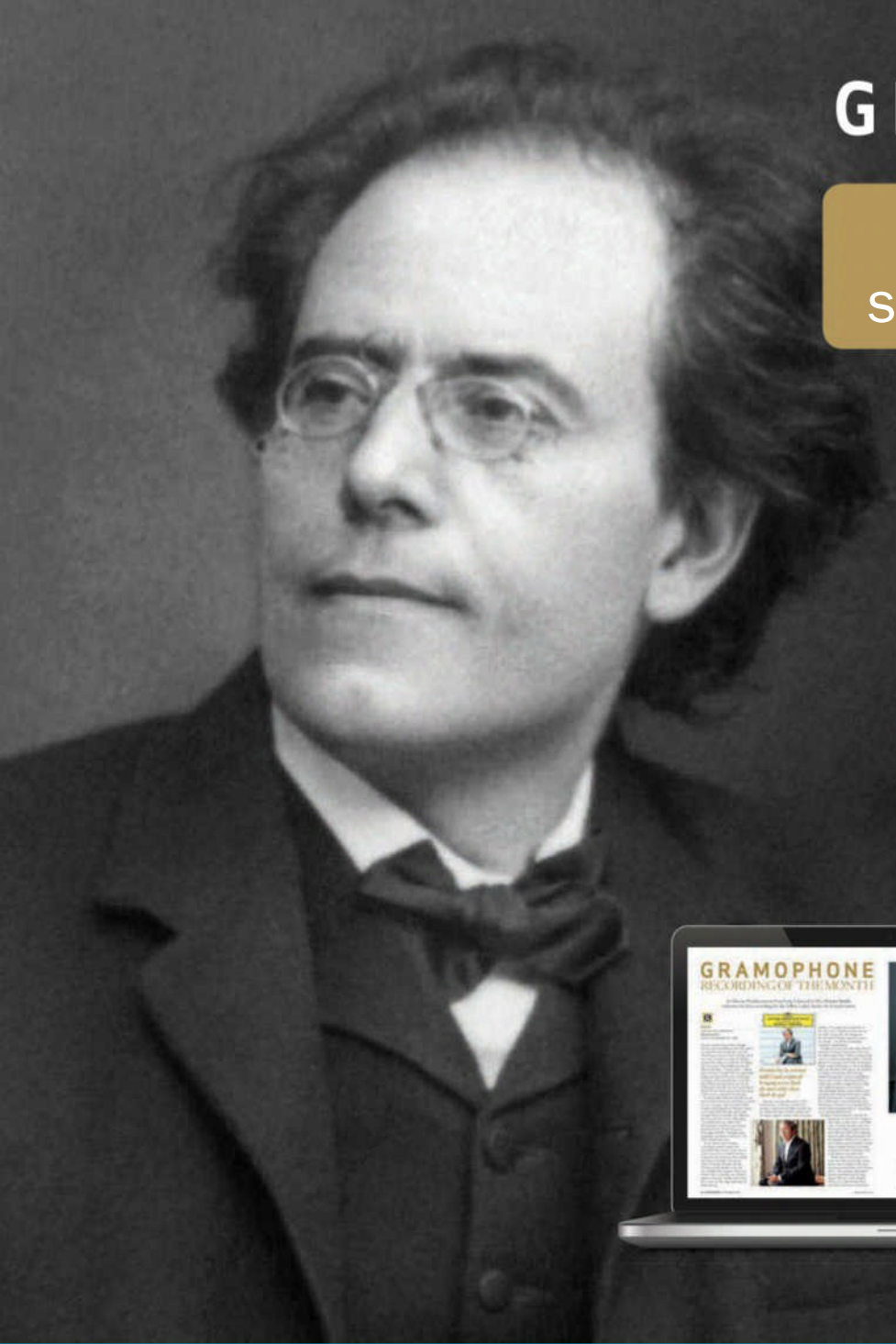
Innova's recording omits the Buxtehude – the 2016 concert ran for some three and a half hours – and presents the new works, which are all performable and viable separately, in a musically satisfying sequence different to Buxtehude's. Each is very different in structure, too, none replicating the oratorio's hexapartite mix of orchestral concertinos and ritornellos with vocal ensembles and arias. However, Caroline Shaw's *To the Hands* is in six sections, all vocal and instrumental, her music weaving in and out of Buxtehude's in beguiling fashion. By contrast, Hans Thomalla's *I come near you* – taking the breast as its membrum – is a meditative motet. Its thematic material also derives from Buxtehude but uses multiphonics and other techniques the Danish master could not have dreamt of. Anna Thorvaldsdóttir's beautiful *Ad genua/To the knees* (setting a text by Guðrun Eva Minervudóttir), David T Little's lowering *dress in magic amulets, dark from My feet* and Santa Ratniece's sweeter-toned *My soul will sink within me* are also single-span, motet-like pieces.

Perhaps the most individual responses came from the late, great Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, who died last year after completing *Ad cor*, and Lewis Spratlan. *Ad cor* is in four movements, the finale formed by performing the first three simultaneously. It is the most varied in texture, too, the third span ('I laugh at you mockingly') dominated by the percussionist's declaiming Ursula Andkjær Olsen's text. Spratlan's *Common Ground* is an oratorio-in-miniature in a prologue and three scenes, the subject of which is the degradation of the environment.

Innova's sound beautifully captures the acoustic of St Peter's Church in Malvern, Pennsylvania. The Crossing's performances are superbly articulated, with the accompaniments from the International Contemporary Ensemble splendidly realised. A fascinating programme that I will return to. **Guy Rickards**

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Contemporary music deserves our support

This issue's Recording of the Month is, unusually, a new work. The unusual nature of this shouldn't imply that *Gramophone* doesn't support new music, for we do, very much so: most months see something from the pen of a living composer in Editor's Choice, and every month brings an exploration of one of today's leading writers of music in our Contemporary Composer feature.

But the fact remains that most music in the concert hall and on disc is of composers past not present. It's understandable: such music has had the privilege of time both to work its way into our consciousness and to have become part of the ever-evolving cultural language through which we speak and create. Time, also, has filtered what has reached us (sometimes fairly, sometimes carelessly) so that a programme of, say, 18th-century music, is likely to contain a higher proportion of masterpieces than an 18th-century audience might have heard on an average evening.

To listen only to the music of the past, though, is to miss engaging with a key way that music can reflect our age's voice, both in sound and subject. Which brings me back to James MacMillan's *Stabat mater*. The work, an epic 55-minute setting of the extraordinary meditation on Mary at the foot of the Cross, was commissioned by the philanthropist John Studzinski and his Genesis Foundation. The idea came to him after hearing Rossini's *Stabat mater*: in a rather wonderful twist, it wasn't that the experience brought inspiration but frustration, the setting containing, as he told *Gramophone* a few years ago, 'not one element of devotion, faith, hope or humanity'. So he commissioned James MacMillan, whose music couldn't be more different.



The music world is fortunate to have figures like John Studzinski, as commissioning – let alone performing – new music is an expensive business. But there are different ways individuals can get involved. The American composer Augusta Read Thomas – whose Chicago Ear Taxi festival last year featured 53 world premieres – recently told me about the imaginative ways she's witnessed music being commissioned, whatever people's resources. Of her own works, one marking the anniversary of a scientific breakthrough was commissioned by the scientist's wife; another was supported by a commissioning club of donors.

And then, of course, there are the organisations, without whom the music landscape would be much poorer. Grant-making bodies, orchestras, dance companies, labels, concert halls, choirs, festivals and broadcasters – and, in the case of the Proms of course, both at once: this year's festival will contain no fewer than 15 world premieres. The Royal Opera House, meanwhile, will next season unveil new operas from both George Benjamin and Mark-Anthony Turnage.

But to do this work, all such people and such organisations need our support, both our voices and our ears (and, for those who are able, our pockets too).

And so even if next month's Recording of the Month does return us to a genius of the past, as statistics suggest it will, contemporary music will always have an honoured place in our pages – just as it should, I would suggest, in every *Gramophone* reader's collection.

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'Spending time with an enormous pile of obscure Monteverdi recordings and talking to most of my heroes was a tough job, but somebody had to do it,' quips **DAVID VICKERS**, writer of our cover story. 'It was fascinating to trace the development of the Monteverdi revival through to its relatively recent flourishing.'



'I couldn't wait to discuss the Franck Sonata recording with Isabelle Faust,' says **CHARLOTTE GARDNER**, who interviews the German violinist in this issue. 'When I listened to her recording beforehand, I was blown away.'



'I knew that auditioning 40-odd recordings of Brahms's First Serenade would be a pleasurable task,' says **ANDREW FARACH-COLTON**, author of this month's Collection. 'But what surprised me was how much it altered my understanding of this misunderstood masterpiece.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • David Allen • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Richard Bratby Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Philip Clark • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood Charlotte Gardner • Caroline Gill • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott Richard Lawrence • Andrew Mellor • Kate Molleson • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepil Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Julie Anne Sadie Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

'*Gramophone*, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.'

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: IMAGNO/GETTY IMAGES

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WARNER CLASSICS

NEW RELEASES ON WARNER CLASSICS AND ERATO

ERATO



MARIE NICOLE LEMIEUX
SI, SI, SI, SI !: ROSSINI

New Erato signing in a recital of Rossini arias and duets from *Tancredi*, *Semiramide*, *L'italiana* in *Algeri* and other operas, live from Montpellier.



THE KNIGHTS, YO-YO MA,
AZUL: GOLIJOV

The cutting-edge Brooklyn-based chamber orchestra joins forces with Yo-Yo Ma in a programme including Golijov's Cello Concerto: *Azul*.



LES VENTS FRANÇAIS,
BEETHOVEN

The critically acclaimed 6-piece wind ensemble return with a programme dedicated to Beethoven's music for wind instruments.



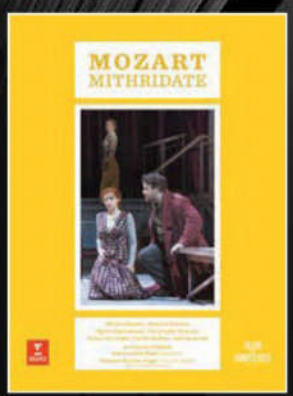
RENAUD CAPUÇON + ENSEMBLE
BRAHMS STRING SEXTETS 1&2

Recorded live at the Aix Easter Festival 2016, the sextets are amongst the most skilfully-written works of the Romantic chamber music canon.



DIANA DAMRAU
GRAND OPERA: MEYERBEER

A dazzling recital of arias by the master of Parisian grand opera, includes two world premiere recordings.



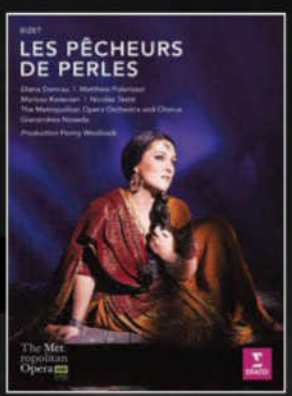
EMMANUELLE HAÏM
MITRIDATE: MOZART

The 2016 Théâtre des Champs-Élysées production of *Mitridate*, Mozart's rarely staged early opera.



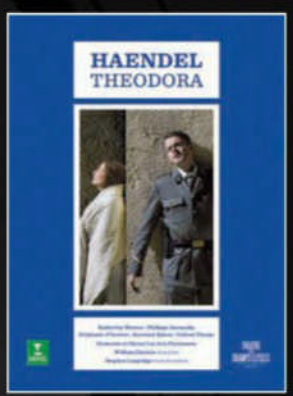
DIANA DAMRAU, RICCARDO MUTI
EUROPA RICONOSCIUTA:

The 2006 Teatro alla Scala production of Salieri's *Europa riconosciuta*, here its first-ever DVD release.



DIANA DAMRAU
LES PÊCHEURS DE PERLES:

The 2016 The Metropolitan Opera production of Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs de perles*. Available on DVD & Blu-Ray.



PHILIPPE JAROUSSKY
THEODORA: HANDEL

The 2016 Théâtre des Champs-Élysées production of *Theodora*, Handel's favourite oratorio.
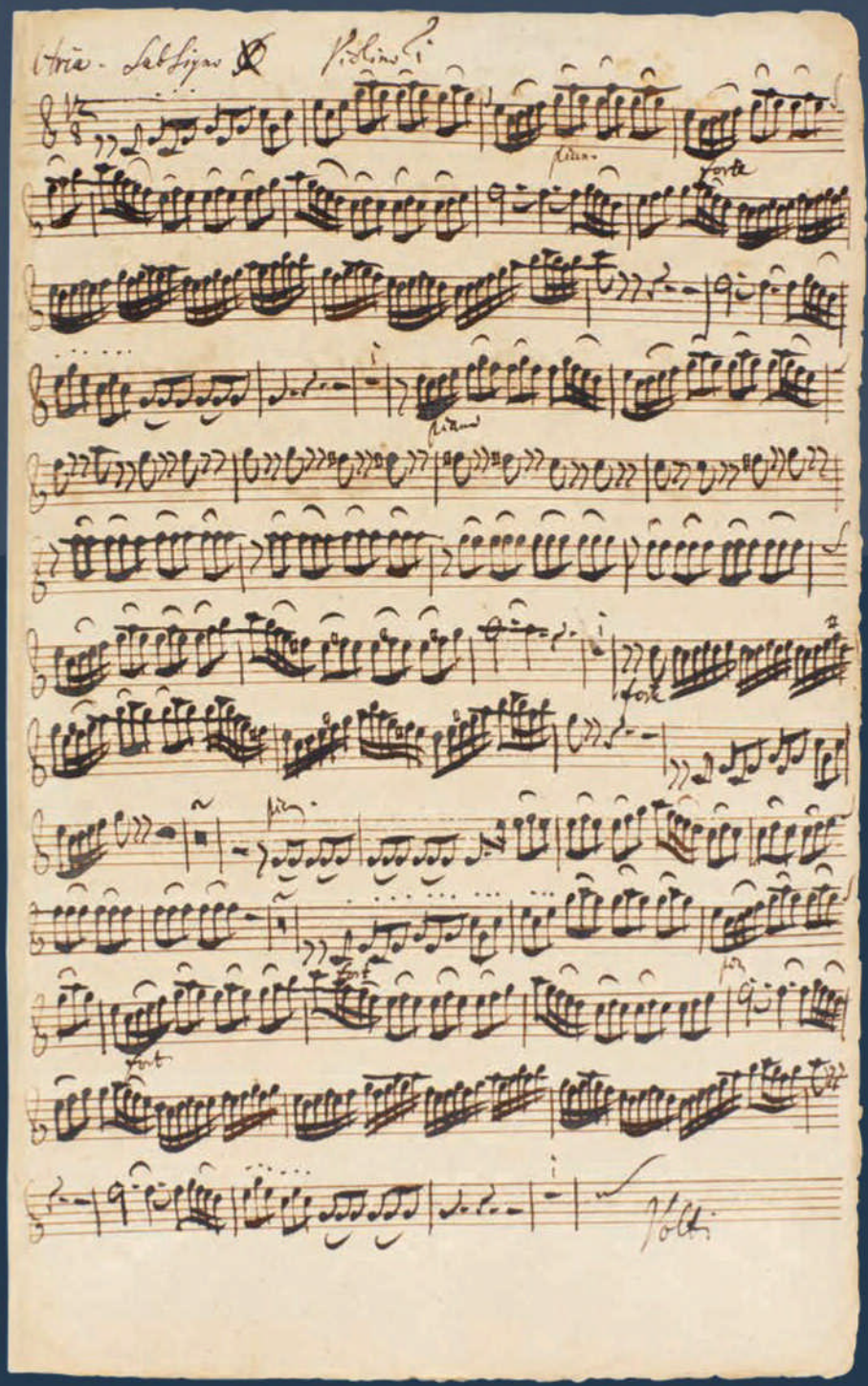


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Musical Manuscripts
Auction London
23 May 2017

J.S. Bach's arrangement for violin of the aria 'Der alte Drache brennt vor Neid' from Cantata no.130, Herr Gott Dich loben alle wir, (Leipzig, c.1732–1735)
Estimate £300,000–400,000

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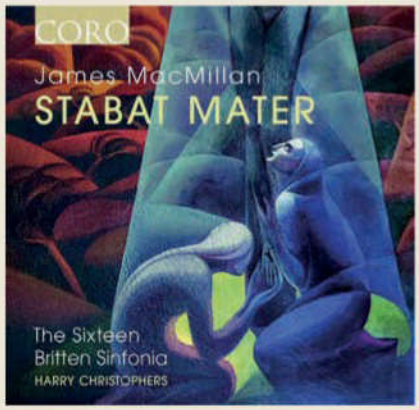
EST. 1744

GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



MacMILLAN
Stabat mater
The Sixteen; Britten Sinfonia / Harry Christophers
Coro
▶ MARC ROCHESTER'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 28

A highly moving setting of this ancient text – James MacMillan's score embodies Mary's grief and pain with extraordinary power. The Sixteen respond with singing of searing intensity.



CLEMENTI
Symphonies
Salzburg Mozarteum Orchestra / Ivor Bolton
Sony Classical
'Plenty to intrigue and delight', writes reviewer Richard Wigmore, perfectly capturing why this set of Clementi symphonies is well worth exploring and enjoying.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 33



ELGAR Cello Concerto
TCHAIKOVSKY
Rococo Variations
Johannes Moser *vc* **Suisse Romande Orchestra / Andrew Manze**
Pentatone
We've had a number of very fine Elgar Cello Concerto discs of late, and Johannes Moser's is right up there with them.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 34



'THE ITALIAN JOB'
La Serenissima / Adrian Chandler
Avie
Delightfully spirited and full of vitality, there's a palpable sense of the thrill of collaborative music-making throughout this impressive recording from Baroque specialists La Serenissima.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 47



BEETHOVEN
Violin Sonatas
James Ehnes *vn*
Andrew Armstrong *pf*
Onyx
James Ehnes, one of today's most thoughtful and consistently superb solo violinists, and pianist Andrew Armstrong on equally brilliant form, offer their first disc of Beethoven violin sonatas.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 51



BRUCH
Two String Quintets. String Octet
The Nash Ensemble
Hyperion
Compelling immediacy – both in terms of the performance and the vivid recorded sound – allows this disc to make a strong case for Bruch's chamber music.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 53



JS BACH
'Bach Reimagines Bach'
William Carter *lute*
Linn
William Carter brings a remarkable depth of artistry to whichever member of the early plucked string family – and whichever composer – he's playing: here it's the lute, and Bach, and it's a beautiful listen.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 61



BEETHOVEN
Piano Sonatas
Sunwook Kim *pf*
Accentus
The familiar is rendered striking in these performances of some of the best-known works in the solo piano repertoire; a disc that confirms Sunwook Kim as a very fine artist indeed.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 62



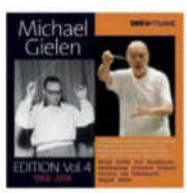
HAYDN
The Seasons
Gabrieli Consort & Players / Paul McCreesh
Signum
Paul McCreesh takes the substantial music forces here gathered, adds energy and a sure sense of the work's grandeur and moments of beauty, and offers us something really rather special.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 79



'HEROINES OF LOVE AND LOSS'
Ruby Hughes *sop* **Mime Yamahiro Brinkmann** *vc* **Jonas Nordberg** *theorbo*
BIS
The young British soprano Ruby Hughes brings interpretations of aching beauty to these 17th-century pieces, every song so personal and communicative.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 87



DVD/BLU-RAY
VERDI Un ballo in maschera
Sols; Chorus of the Bavarian State Opera; Bavarian State Orchestra / Zubin Mehta
C Major Entertainment
An unusual though intriguing staging concept, plus fine performances, earn this a 'strongly recommended' from reviewer Mike Ashman.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 98



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
MICHAEL GIELEN EDITION, VOL 4
SWR Music
'Even more revelatory than the first three volumes', suggests Rob Cowan of the latest instalment in this Michael Gielen series.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 104

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FOR THE RECORD



Fanny Mendelssohn composed her Easter Sonata at the age of 22

Credit where it's due: a premiere for Fanny Mendelssohn's Easter Sonata

In 1829, a 22-year-old Fanny Mendelssohn noted in her journal that she had finished composing her *Easter Sonata*. To celebrate International Women's Day this year the sonata was given it's first correctly attributed performance in a public concert hall, by Sofya Gulyak at the Royal College of Music in London and broadcast live on BBC Radio 3. In reviewing the performance for *The Telegraph*, Ivan Hewett wrote that Gulyak's performance 'revealed an astonishing piece of restless energy and burning spiritual aspiration'.

The story of how this sonata managed to remain in the shadows for so long brings to the fore the kinds of obstacles and prejudice that Fanny faced as a composer when she was alive and, indeed, continues to face today. The manuscript – signed, unhelpfully, 'F Mendelssohn' – was discovered in a Paris bookshop by Henri-Jacques Coudert in 1970. Coudert assumed that the composer of the sonata was Fanny's younger brother Felix and the pianist Eric Heidsieck recorded the work – presented as Felix's sonata – in 1973.

In 2010, an American musicologist, Angela Mace Christian, heard a performance of the piece and suspected it to be the work of Fanny. She persuaded Coudert to allow her to see the manuscript and, though Coudert continues to assert that the *Easter Sonata* 'can't be by Fanny. It's a masterpiece… very masculine. Very violent', Christian could see that the manuscript was in Fanny's hand and that the number of crossings out would mean that it couldn't just be a copy of a composition by her brother, but was, in fact, her own work. Also, the page numberings proved that the manuscript had been removed from Fanny's own book of compositions, currently held in the Mendelssohn archive in Berlin.

The *Easter Sonata* is one of around 500 individual works that Fanny is thought to have composed by the time of her death from a stroke at the age of 41 in 1847. Many of these works remain unpublished and unperformed to this day.

BBC announces Ten Pieces III repertoire for primary schools

The BBC's Ten Pieces project aims to inspire school children by introducing them to 10 pieces of classical music and offering their teachers resources with which to help them explore the music. Ten Pieces I was aimed at primary schools and Ten Pieces II secondary, Ten Pieces III is again aimed at primary schools for the 2017/18 academic year and includes a new commission for *a cappella* voices by Kerry Andrew. The text for Andrew's *No Place Like*

IN THE STUDIO

Andrew Manze's RVW cycle

Andrew Manze's survey of the Vaughan Williams symphonies with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra for Onyx, which began with a pairing of the Second and Eighth symphonies (06/16), continues with new readings of the Third and Fourth symphonies (which will be reviewed in the next issue) and the Fifth and Sixth, which will be released in early 2018. In reviewing the first volume, Andrew Achenbach wrote: 'the spruce performance of the Eighth reveals Manze as a stylish and committed interpreter.'

Haydn from Houston

Andrés Orozco-Estrada joined the Houston Symphony as music director in 2014, signing a five-year contract, a contract that he has recently extended for a further three years, committing himself to the orchestra until 2022. Clearly the orchestra are delighted to have the Colombian at the helm, and have been recording Dvořák's late symphonies and *Slavonic Dances* for Pentatone (Symphony No 9 is reviewed this issue). Later this year Pentatone will release their new recording of Haydn's *The Creation*.

Venetian brass from the RAM

In February 2017, the Royal Academy of Music and Juilliard Brass (directed by Reinhold Friedrich) headed to St Jude's Church, Hampstead Garden Suburb, to record the major Giovanni Gabrieli

PHOTOGRAPHY: THE GRANGER COLLECTION/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO. WERNER KMETITSCH. KRISTIN HOEBERMANN

comprises contributions from UK school children who were asked to write about where they come from; the suggestions ranged from 'mummy's tummy' to 'the Big Bang'.

Other works on this year's list include extracts from Mason Bates's *Anthology of Fantastic Zoology*, Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges's Symphony No 1, Copland's *Rodeo*, Dvořák's Symphony No 9 and Elgar's *Enigma* Variations. Tony Hall, Director-General of the BBC, said: 'Ten Pieces is the biggest commitment the BBC has ever made to music education in the UK and I'm so proud that it continues to inspire children to find out more about classical music.'



Andrés Orozco-Estrada tackles Haydn

canzonas and sonatas, alongside works by his contemporaries, for a Venetian Brass disc. Due for release in early 2018, this follows *The Soldier's Tale* with Oliver Knussen – well received in our pages in March – on the RAM's series of recordings with Linn Records.

Louis Lortie's Chopin series

In September, Chandos will release Volume 5 of Louis Lortie's recordings dedicated to the solo piano music of Chopin; this time Lortie focuses on the Mazurkas and Polonaises.

LSO appoints François-Xavier Roth as Principal Guest Conductor

The London Symphony Orchestra has further augmented its roster of associate conductors with the appointment of François-Xavier Roth as Principal Guest Conductor from the start of the 2017/18 season in September. Roth will replace Daniel Harding, who leaves his position after 10 years to concentrate on his music directorships of the Orchestre de Paris and the Swedish Radio SO.

Roth has had a relationship with the LSO since he won the Donatella Flick Conducting Competition in 2000 and so became the orchestra's assistant conductor. He was Principal Conductor of the SWR Symphony Orchestra, Baden-Baden and Freiburg from 2011 to 2016 and he is also the current General Music Director of the city of Cologne.

Besides Roth, from September the LSO's roster of in-house conductors will include Sir Simon Rattle, who joins the orchestra as Music Director this year, Gianandrea Noseda as fellow Principal Guest Conductor, Michael Tilson Thomas as Conductor Laureate and André Previn as Conductor Emeritus. Of the appointment, Roth said: 'I am looking forward to the many musical adventures that we will take on together and excited by the dialogue already begun with the musicians themselves and of course with Sir Simon Rattle, alongside whom it is a great privilege to work with this fabulous ensemble.'



François-Xavier Roth: a new position with the LSO

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GRAMOPHONE PODCASTS: JUAN DIEGO FLÓREZ

For a decade and a half Juan Diego Flórez has been a stalwart star of the world's leading stages and, for that matter, of the pages of *Gramophone* too. Ahead of a recital at London's Royal Albert Hall on June 2 – for which *Gramophone* is the media partner – we interview the acclaimed tenor about the personal programme of arias he's chosen.



Other new *Gramophone* Podcasts this month include interviews with Ian Page of The Classical Opera Company about early Mozart operas, concert arias and the singers who inspired them, and with pianist Dejan Lazić on the extraordinary genius of Liszt.

21ST-CENTURY CLASSICAL

The rich diversity of contemporary classical music means that it can be difficult to know which composers to explore next. This is why in each issue of *Gramophone* we profile the music of a particular contemporary composer and make recommendations of recordings to investigate. We've gathered a few of these guides together online, and we hope that they will help you to find music that speaks in a way that only new music can. Featured composers include Nico Muhly, Sally Beamish, Christopher Fox, Augusta Read Thomas and Brett Dean.
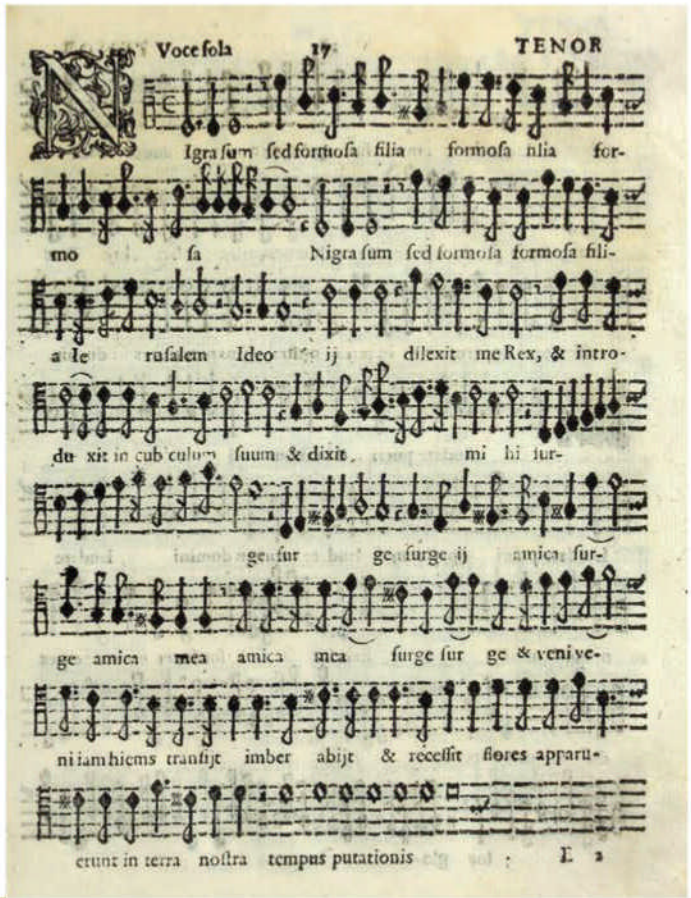


La Compagnia del Madrigale record the Vespers and, far right, 'Nigra sum' from the tenor partbook

Why Monteverdi still sings

In celebration of the 450th anniversary of Monteverdi's birth this May, **David Vickers** talks to renowned musicians about how the interpretation of the composer's music continues to evolve

PHOTOGRAPHY: GIORGIO VERGNANO





No other composer who was alive in the 16th century is as popular on recordings and in modern concert halls and opera houses as Claudio Monteverdi. The 450th anniversary of his birth in Cremona, where he was baptised on May 15, 1567, is an opportune moment to reappraise his exceptional but often enigmatic music. *L'Orfeo* (1607) has become firmly established in the operatic canon; the so-called 1610 *Vespers* is a beloved favourite of choral singers all over the world; and there are more alternative recordings of his diverse books of madrigals and other secular vocal music than is the case for any of his most deserving contemporaries. Almost all of the aforementioned music was written for Mantua, where by 1590 Monteverdi was employed as a musician at the court of Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga. He was promoted to *maestro della musica* in 1601, but after more than 20 years of service he was sacked by the new duke, Francesco Gonzaga, in 1612. A year later, in August 1613, the out-of-work Monteverdi auditioned for the prestigious post of *maestro di cappella* at the Basilica San Marco in Venice. He impressed the procurators so much that they offered him the job on the spot, and he remained there for the rest of his life. On March 13, 1620, he declined an invitation from the Gonzagas to return to Mantua, writing gleefully to an intermediary that, in Venice, when he was about to perform chamber or church music, 'the whole city comes running'.

Monteverdi is regarded as the supreme musical genius of a period of transition that straddled the late Italian Renaissance and the dawn of the Baroque era, but within a few years of his burial in Venice's Milanese chapel at Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in 1643 his works were almost completely forgotten. A few 18th-century music historians discussed him briefly out of a purely antiquarian curiosity, but it was not until the late 19th century that a small handful of his works were published in modern editions. The acceleration of interest in Monteverdi's music in the early years of the 20th century was spearheaded by composers who were inspired to make their own radical 'realisations' of his works. One of these was Gian Francesco Malipiero, whose fascination for Monteverdi led to his monumental collected edition of the complete works (1926-42), which had a seismic impact upon gradually increasing the number of performances, the proliferation of alternative editions of individual works and the first trickle of commercial recordings. In 1937, Nadia Boulanger made a seminal recording of assorted madrigals sung chorally with piano accompaniment, and it was also in Paris that Anthony Lewis conducted the first relatively complete recording of the 1610 *Vespers* for L'Oiseau-Lyre (1953). Two further landmarks were August Wenzinger's recording of *L'Orfeo* on historical instruments (DG Archiv, 1955), and Jürgen Jürgens's ground-breaking *Vespers* (Telefunken, 1967) with his Monteverdi Choir of Hamburg, members of the Vienna Boys Choir, plainsong specialists Capella Antiqua München and the innovative period-instrument ensemble Concentus Musicus Wien (its founder Nikolaus Harnoncourt proceeding to record influential 'realisations' of Monteverdi's late Venetian operas for Teldec Das Alte Werk in the 1970s).

MADRIGAL TRAILBLAZERS

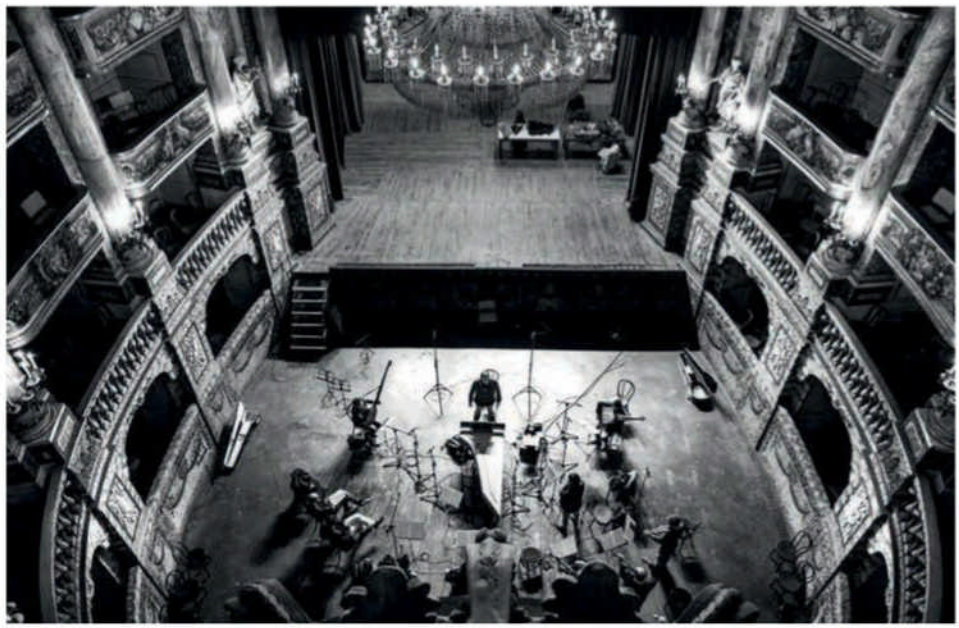
Among the many innovators at the vanguard of the Monteverdi revival in the 1980s, the trailblazing Consort of Musicke helped bring about an influential transformation. Their idiomatic use of single voices revealed the full breadth of the vocal chamber music's diverse styles and musical quality. Their anthology 'Madrigali erotici' (L'Oiseau-Lyre, 12/82), prepared in the wake of their explorations of Dowland, drew extensively from the Seventh Book of Madrigals. Director and lutenist Anthony Rooley points out: 'It's worth remembering that in the early '80s there were virtually no Italian artists of international standing who were paying attention to their rich tradition of late 16th- and early 17th-century music. I had reference to very few recordings from English, Dutch and German artists, but nothing that inspired me – so a fresh start had to be made. We were still in our infancy as a vocal consort, and went through intense preparations that began to really bear fruit in our next Monteverdi recordings – the Fourth Book in 1983

'When we rehearsed the madrigals, we studied the incredible structural elements in the poetry, all of which Monteverdi brings out' – *Paul Agnew, Les Arts Florissants*

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALFREDO VITOLO/MUSEO INTERNAZIONALE E BIBLIOTECA DELLA MUSICA DI BOLOGNA



Madrigal trilogy: Les Arts Florissants' Paul Agnew



Journeying 'from dark to light': Alessandrini and Concerto Italiano record Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda

and the Fifth Book in 1984. We had inspiring help with Italian diction from Sylvia Dimiziani – she was our living link to Italian rhetoric and emphasis. We were, of course, inevitably still English – but with a growing awareness of Italianate delights.' Dame Emma Kirkby reflects: 'I used to say to people that we were like a vocal string quartet – we'd got very steady personnel, we grew together and had a wonderful time, and its collectiveness was very satisfying. It was a wonderful ritual feeling, while at the same time we were all sharing human emotions. The core members – me, Evelyn Tubb, Mary Nichols and Andrew King – were the same for about 20 years.'

By the time the Consort of Musicke's Monteverdi series continued with Virgin there had been the addition of fresh-voiced young tenor Paul Agnew, who now sings his own madrigal projects alongside colleagues in Les Arts Florissants. He explains why their recent trilogy of mixed Monteverdian albums was divided into periods devoted to Cremona, Mantua and Venice. 'The recordings were all taken from live concerts of the complete books, but I wanted to present a digestible guide to Monteverdi's laboratory – which is essentially the five-voice form. The first three books of madrigals from the early Cremonese years are packed with charming things, but then the Mantuan music in Books Four, Five and Six are clearly the fruits of him being pushed by Vincenzo Gonzaga's interests and tastes, and also of him being influenced by what he's learning about from Ferrara [one of Italy's other 'city-states' ruled by the Este family, for whom Monteverdi also composed], where he has met the poets Tasso and Guarini. Whereas, later on, the madrigal no longer exists – there's not a single five-part unaccompanied vocal piece in the whole of Book Seven! And Book Eight also contains some astonishing concerted music for combinations of solo voices and instruments. So, with Les Arts Florissants, I wanted to capture all these transitions that are the birth of modern music.'

Agnew insists that the poetry is fundamental to a successful understanding of how to sing these pieces. 'When we first rehearsed them, the only thing we did for the first sessions was to work with Rita de Letteriis, who is not only an Italian coach but also immersed in the poetry of this time. We talked about the scansion of the metre, the rhyming structures, the internal rhymes, and the riposte – there are incredible structural elements in the poetry, and Monteverdi brings out all of these. It helps us to start exactly where Monteverdi himself started, with two pieces of paper on the table – one with the poem on it and the other one with nothing.'

Rinaldo Alessandrini expresses a similar mantra about the supremacy of text when telling me about Concerto Italiano's long-awaited return to Monteverdi madrigals for a mixed programme recorded in the court theatre at Caserta. 'When we first encountered Monteverdi's music in the early '90s it was very rare to approach this music in Italy with a group of solo singers. It was totally new for us, and maybe we were a little bit too excited! I think we were too anxious to *use* the music – and our main mistake was to treat it using the same chemistry familiar to us in later repertoire. Everything we did had a lot of diminuendos, crescendos – a lot of pure musical effects. But since then, I've realised that what you really have to manipulate is the text, and that everything else around it is a kind of reflection of the poetry. You can almost decide that in some ways the music doesn't exist – the truth of the music is hidden in plain sight, just behind the text. So for this new project it was a change for us to approach all of the music afresh. Now we're just trying to recreate the possibility of being surprised by the poetry!' Concerto Italiano's new Naïve album, 'Night: Stories of Lovers and Warriors', was conceived as a dramatic presentation with a narrative arc: 'It gave us an opportunity to revisit several of the major pieces from Book Eight – *Combattimento*, *Lamento della ninfa*, and *Hor che'l ciel e la terra* – but collected together with nice things from other publications. It is like a character is speaking about the very strange effect of night on the soul and on the mind. But then the story continues with *Ecco mormorar l'onde* from Book Two – the moment when the sun finally rises again. And we end with *Quando l'alba in oriente*, one of the *Scherzi musicali*; a text that describes the sun. So the theme is not just about night, but it is a journey from dark to light, from despair to hope.'

EXPLORING THE VENETIAN CHURCH MUSIC

I Fagiolini have never been artists to record Monteverdi's music by the book, so to speak. Reluctance to tread along well-worn paths is why Robert Hollingworth has so far resisted the urge to record the 1610 *Vespers*. Instead, their contribution to the Monteverdi anniversary is cheekily entitled 'The Other Vespers': it's a liturgical reconstruction of a *Vespers* for the Feast of St John the Baptist as it might have been done in 1620 (an occasion described somewhat unreliably by an enthusiastic

PHOTOGRAPHY: PASCAL GELY, JULIEN DUBOIS

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Dutch tourist who was impressed by hearing Monteverdi direct some of his own music). Hollingworth bases this alternative Monteverdi *Vespers* on selections from the large published collection *Selva morale e spirituale* (1641). 'I suppose I just wanted to draw attention to this music because there are so many recordings of the 1610 *Vespers*. I reckon there are other things published later on during Monteverdi's Venetian years that are worth looking at as well. There's something fundamentally acoustically exhilarating about Monteverdi's incredibly rich Venetian church music – his skill in the way he voices music so that every chord and every bit of dissonance speaks beautifully. I also wanted to test out the research into what his triple-time signatures really mean in famous pieces like *Beatus vir* because I think that, for decades, we've been doing them too fast and overlooked that Monteverdi's use of time signatures is essentially left over from the Renaissance, and not

MONTEVERDI 450 events in 2017

Our guide to the best anniversary performances in the UK, Europe and the US

UK

Glyndebourne, as part of the Brighton Festival
'The Other Vespers' by I Fagiolini
May 7
This Sunday performance is a reconstruction of a service of the *Vespers* as it might have been celebrated in 1620. I Fagiolini are joined by the English Cornett and Sackbut Ensemble in this programme of vividly virtuosic yet rarely heard works.
brightonfestival.org
ifagiolini.com

Colston Hall, Bristol
Usher Hall, Edinburgh
Monteverdi Choir and Orchestra's Global Monteverdi 450 Tour
May 8, 28 (Bristol)
A significant Monteverdi event this year sees Sir John Eliot Gardiner, the Monteverdi Choir and the English Baroque Soloists undertake a global tour – with an extensive and stellar cast of soloists – of the three surviving Monteverdi operas as well as the *Vespers*. Outstanding UK dates are, in Bristol, *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (May 8) and *L'Orfeo* (May 28), and, at the Edinburgh International Festival, *L'Orfeo* (August 14), *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* (August 15) and *Poppea* (August 17).
monteverdi.co.uk

St John's, Smith Square, London, as part of the London Festival of Baroque
1610 Vespers by Vox Luminis & the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra; L'Orfeo by I Fagiolini
May 14 (Vespers); May 18 (L'Orfeo)
This performance of the 1610 *Vespers* sees Vox Luminis and the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra collaborating for the first time. *L'Orfeo*, meanwhile, is semi-staged by Thomas Guthrie, with I Fagiolini, the English Cornett and Sackbut Ensemble under Robert Hollingworth, and soloists topped by Matthew Long as Orfeo and Rachel Ambrose Evans as Euridice.
lfbm.org.uk

St James's Church, Chipping Campden
1610 Vespers by Vox Luminis & the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra
May 16
The Freiburg Baroque Orchestra and Vox Luminis bring their 1610 *Vespers* performance to the Chipping Campden Music Festival.
campdenmusicfestival.co.uk

Holy Cross Church, Ramsbury
1610 Vespers by Armonico Consort
May 19
Part of the Newbury Spring Festival, the Armonico Consort directed by Christopher Monks perform the 1610 *Vespers* at this Wiltshire venue.
newburyspringfestival.org.uk

Brighton Dome Concert Hall
Lesser-performed Monteverdi by Les Talens Lyriques
May 21
This Brighton Festival performance by Christophe Rousset, Les Talens Lyriques and Soloists of the Opera Studio of the Dutch National Opera features *Il ballo delle Ingrate*, *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda and* a fragment from *L'Arianna*, all staged by Pierre Audi.
brightonfestival.org
lestalenslyriques.com

St John's, Smith Square, London
Madrigal and opera excerpts by Les Talens Lyriques
June 7
Christophe Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques, joined by tenors Anders J Dahlin and Emiliano Gonzalez Toro, deliver another diverse Monteverdi programme here, this time mixing excerpts from his madrigals and operas with works by the composer's contemporaries Castello and Fontana.
sjss.org.uk

Salisbury Cathedral
'The Other Vespers' by I Fagiolini
June 2
Part of the Salisbury International Arts Festival, I Fagiolini's programme presents a reconstruction of the 1620 *Vespers* alongside works by Giovanni Gabrieli, Castella and Viadana.
salisburyfestival.co.uk

The Grange, Northington
Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria by Academy of Ancient Music
June 7, 16, 18, 24; July 2
A new production of *Ulisse* from the Grange Festival's Michael Chance.
thegrangefestival.co.uk

Barbican, London
1610 Vespers by AAM
June 23
Directed by Robert Howarth from the keyboard, this performance of the 1610 *Vespers* by the AAM and Chorus has a strong line-up of soloists: sopranos Rowan Pierce and Louise Alder; tenors Charles Daniels and Thomas Hobbs; and bass Richard Latham.
barbican.org.uk

York Minster, York
I Fagiolini in 'Vespers on the Move'
July 7
This performance of the 1610 *Vespers* in York Minster's Central Nave invites a free-moving audience to experience the work 'up close' by moving into the centre of a horseshoe of musicians. Robert Hollingworth directs I Fagiolini, the English Cornett and Sackbut Ensemble, and York University's The 24.
ncem.co.uk/yemf

Cheltenham Town Hall, Main Hall
L'Orfeo by I Fagiolini
July 9
I Fagiolini's semi-staged performance of *L'Orfeo* comes to the Cheltenham Music Festival, preceded by a free talk by Robert Hollingworth at 6pm.
cheltenhamfestivals.com/music

Gloucester Cathedral
1610 Vespers by AAM
July 14
Robert Howarth conducts the AAM and Chorus in the 1610 *Vespers* with soprano Rowan Pierce, tenor Gwilym Bowen and bass Richard Latham.
cheltenhamfestivals.com/music

Winchester Cathedral
Cantate Domino; 1610 Vespers
July 20 (Cantate); July 22 (Vespers)
The first of the Southern Cathedral Festival's Monteverdi events sees Winchester Cathedral's boys and men perform Monteverdi's *Cantate Domino* in an afternoon concert to also include works by composers including Lotti, Palestrina and Bairstow. The festival's final concert sees the Cathedral Choirs joined by Florilegium for a performance of the 1610 *Vespers* in which the choir and soloists are positioned around the cathedral.
southerncathedralsfestival.org.uk

Milton Abbey, Dorset
VOCES8 and Scholars perform 1610 Vespers
August 2, 4
Part of the Milton Abbey International Festival, these *Vespers* performances see festival hosts VOCES8 joined by the VOCES8 Scholars.
miltonabbeyfestival.com
voces8.com

The Old Market, Hove, as part of New Brighton Early Music Festival
L'Orfeo
November 8, 11, 12
This Thomas Guthrie-staged *L'Orfeo* features the Monteverdi String Band, the English Cornett and Sackbut Ensemble, and a cast of student singers, all under the musical direction of Deborah Roberts.
bremf.org.uk

EUROPE

Salzburg, Lucerne, Berlin, et al
Monteverdi Choir and Orchestra's Global Monteverdi 450 Tour
April 10 – October 21
The lion's share of upcoming concerts as part of this global tour are in Europe. Check the website for details of performances at the Salzburg and Lucerne Festivals plus Berlin's MusikFest, along with further showings in France, Spain, Poland and Italy. European highlights include, in June, the complete trilogy of operas at Venice's La Fenice. The *Vespers* also features in some performances.
monteverdi.co.uk

Dutch National Opera, Amsterdam
Lesser-performed Monteverdi by Les Talens Lyriques
May 11, 13, 16, 17, 19
Amsterdam is the first and major venue for these performances from Christophe Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques, with staging by Pierre Audi and featuring Soloists of the Opera Studio of the Dutch National Opera.
Lestalenslyriques.com

Teatro Verdi, Pisa
L'Épau Abbey, Le Mans
Les Arts Florissants perform 'Mantova'
May 16 (Pisa); May 18 (Le Mans)
This programme, entitled 'Mantova', sees tenor Paul Agnew direct Les Arts Florissants in excerpts from the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Books of Madrigals. It's worth noting that the ensemble have just released a box-set on Harmonia Mundi of the complete Monteverdi recordings made with William Christie over the past 15 years.

an anticipation of the late Baroque. This can result in things that are quite different from what we've all become used to!'

Nevertheless, the 1610 *Vespers* remains ubiquitous for plenty of good reasons, and last month saw a scrubbed-up reissue of Sir John Eliot Gardiner's famous DG Archiv recording (audio and film) made at Venice's Basilica San Marco in 1989. As Gardiner remembers, 'It was an extraordinary experience because we were trying to do a live television broadcast whilst ▸



Les Talens Lyriques and Dutch National Opera singers perform rare Monteverdi

In addition, for medici.tv subscribers, there's a fascinating archive to explore online which houses the ensemble's complete Monteverdi madrigals concert series recorded at Paris's Cité de la Musique.
arts-florissants.com; medici.tv

Stift Melk, Austria
The Sixteen
June 3
Featuring eight singers and five instrumentalists, this concert by The Sixteen (which forms part of the Internationale Barocktage 2017) is held in Austria's picturesque Melk Abbey and comprises some of the finest works from Monteverdi's years as director of the Basilica San Marco in Venice.
thesixteen.com

Royal Chapel, Versailles
Ensemble Pygmalion in 1610 Vespers
June 10, 11
Gramophone Award-winning Ensemble Pygmalion under the direction of Raphaël Pichon are always worth catching, and this performance of Monteverdi's 1610 *Vespers* at Versailles' Royal Chapel promises a wonderful sense of occasion. The soloists are soprano Giuseppina Bridelli, mezzo Eva Zaïcik, tenors Emiliano Gonzalez Toro and Magnus Staveland, and bass Virgile Ancely.
chateauversailles-spectacles.fr/spectacles/2017/monteverdi-vespro-della-beata-vergine

Cour des Hospices, Beaune
Open-air L'Orfeo
July 29
For a picturesque Monteverdi event this summer, look no further than this al fresco *L'Orfeo*. Held in the walled town of Beaune in Burgundy, the performance features the Choir and Orchestra of Les Cris de Paris, conducted by Geoffroy Jourdain, and is part of the town's International Festival of Baroque and Romantic Opera. The cast is headed up by tenor Reinoud van Mechelen in the title-role, soprano Francesca Aspromonte as Euridice, and tenor Alban Dufourt as Apollo.
festivalbeaune.com

Callas, Provence, as part of the Musique Cordiale Festival
1610 Vespers
August 10
In one of the highlights of this Seillans-based Provençal festival, Graham Ross conducts the Festival Choir and Orchestra plus soloists in a performance of the 1610 *Vespers*.
musique-cordiale.com

US

Harris Theater, Chicago; Lincoln Center, New York
Monteverdi Choir and Orchestra's Global Monteverdi 450 Tour
October 12, 13, 15 (Chicago)
October 18, 19, 21 (New York)
The extensive US leg of Sir John Eliot Gardiner's global tour with the Monteverdi Choir and the English Baroque Soloists takes in the cities of Chicago and New York, with a performance of all three Monteverdi's operas at each venue.
monteverdi.co.uk

Carmel Mission Basilica, Carmel, CA
July 19, 26
Last heard at the 2010 Carmel Bach Festival, the 1610 *Vespers* returns to the event this year with performances at the atmospheric Mission Basilica by the Festival's Orchestra and Chorale, conducted by Andrew Megill.
bachfestival.org

PHOTOGRAPHY: RUTH WALZ AND HANS HIJMERING

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Hollingworth and I Fagiolini record 'The Other Vespers'; a scene from the group's 2007 film The Full Monteverdi

also making a gramophone recording for DG – and it was hampered by the fact that the BBC were on strike for one of the two performances. Their lighting team and cameramen wanted to record both concerts but couldn't cross the picket line, so we had only the second performance to get everything right for the film version. Then, as soon as the concert began, a dog started barking in a tower nearby and it carried on for 15 minutes, which meant that, after the end of the performance, we had to re-record the beginning. In fact, we ended up filming all through the night, and we only stopped because the sunlight came through the windows of the Basilica at dawn and the BBC cameramen couldn't film anymore!'

Andrew Parrott's landmark recording of the *Vespers* reappraised many fundamental questions, not least new ideas about the size of vocal forces, reordering the contents of the 1610 print into a plausible liturgical context, and trying out the theory of *chiavette* clefs so that 'Lauda Jerusalem' and the *Magnificat* were performed about a fourth lower. As Parrott insists, 'The details and problems of musicology that I got involved in afterwards were only as a result of an initial instinct to try out Monteverdi's music for myself in order to see what could happen, and then I started to ask difficult questions about it. The use of single voices in much of the *Vespers* music and playing on period instruments were not the only issues *per se*, but I was certainly interested in music-making that could work on a different level in terms of subtlety, intonation, colour and nuance.'

The burgeoning *Vespers* discography is continuing to expand in 2017 with a significant contribution from the label Glossa, which has just issued a fresh take masterminded by the tenor Giuseppe Maletto – a founder member of La Venexiana along with director/countertenor Claudio Cavina, soprano Rossana Bertini and bass Daniele Carnovich (all alumni of Concerto Italiano). Cavina's subsequent interest in opera projects led the core of the madrigal group to continue working together in a collaborative fashion under the name La Compagnia del Madrigale, and it is this ensemble who feature on the Glossa recording. For their new interpretation of the 1610 *Vespers*, they have joined with the additional voices and instrumentalists of Cantica Symphonia, the wind specialists La Pifarescha and organist Luca Guglielmi. Revisiting many significant questions about pitch, instrumentation, continuo practice and tempos, Maletto has opted to follow the published order of music rather than adopt a liturgical reconstruction: 'I think it is a sacrilege to upset the order of the continuous and articulate conversation between pieces that Monteverdi arranged with great care and wisdom,' he says. 'He creates an alternation of chiaroscuro between psalms and concertos that the introduction of Gregorian antiphon disrupts. All the individual works are unique masterpieces, of course, but for me they only acquire their full meaning when they're experienced within a grandiose fresco. No one, for example, would ever think of exchanging panels from Piero della Francesca's *The Polyptych of the Misericordia*!'

'There's no membrane between secular and sacred. There's theatricality in his church music, and spirituality in his secular music' – *Sir John Eliot Gardiner*

When I enquire how Maletto's musical interpretation might differ from other approaches, he observes that 'everyone who performs the *Vespers* probably performed a Vivaldi concerto or a Mozart mass the night before. It's likely that this leads to some confusion of musical languages. So while it's true that the *Vespers* is a work that transcends all ages, we need to be aware that its musical roots are in Renaissance polyphony such as Palestrina, Giaches de Wert and Andrea Gabrieli. But often it's tackled like it's an oratorio by Handel! Also, the rich mixture of continuo instrumentation of theorbos, harp, harpsichord, viola da gamba and a little box organ in sacred music is a modern invention – and the illusion of balance between them is often an artificial trick conjured up by recording engineers! The only continuo instrument cited in the 1610 publication is the organ, so we've used a large, full and bright church organ of the right historical type, and this has revealed a hitherto unknown strength of harmonic richness in this music.'

PHOTOGRAPHY: MATT BRODIE PHOTOGRAPHY, STUART NIMMO

YO-YO MA, CHRIS THILE, EDGAR MEYER



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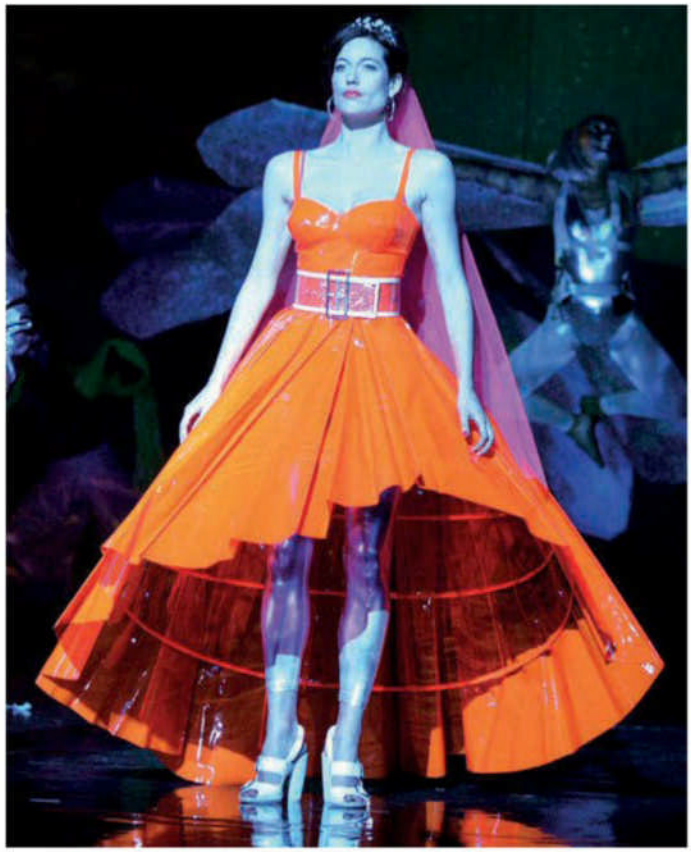
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DELVING INTO THE OPERAS

Gardiner sees the *Vespers* as being intrinsically connected to *L'Orfeo*. 'In Monteverdi, there's no membrane between secular and sacred. There's theatricality in church music, and there's spirituality in secular music, and the colour of the words and of the music is absolutely essential to the aesthetic purpose of Monteverdi – we bleach that at our peril. And nowhere do you see that fusion of sacred and secular more than in La Musica's Prologue. In many respects, *L'Orfeo* is a very religious work that touches profoundly on what it means to be both human and divine, and the *Vespers* is very theatrical – so they're both two sides of the same coin.' Gardiner's landmark recording of *L'Orfeo* was the result of an extensive process. 'My enduring memory is the mesmerising Antony Rolfe Johnson in the title-role. I'd done it with him at English National Opera in a production by David Freeman, sung in English. But although I enjoyed doing it in English, I had insisted that the cast learn it in Italian and that we rehearse it in Italian before we went over to English.'



Exploring Monteverdi's 'huge range of emotions': Kate Royal in ENO's 2007 Poppea

La Venexiana's 2008 *Gramophone* Award-winning *L'Orfeo* (Glossa, recently reissued) brought Italianate warmth, softness and flamboyance to the score, and clearly benefited from the ensemble's extensive experience of working on the complete madrigals project. As Maletto observes, 'What has always characterised Claudio Cavina's approach to Monteverdi is that he is instinctive and direct, sometimes impetuous, but always sincere, passionate and without too much intellectualism.' More recently, in 2013, Andrew Parrott and a reconfigured incarnation of The Taverner Consort and Players strove to recapture the flavour of an oversized madrigal performed privately in a small apartment at the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua – in other words, the conditions of the first performance on February 24, 1607, long before the 20th-century reinvented the work as the first great opera (a genre that did not yet exist in any realistic sense). As Parrott observes, 'In later generations of opera, the music wins over the words, whereas *L'Orfeo*'s balance between those two things is absolutely faultless. On every level, emotionally as well as musically, the music, drama and poetry are in a rare, perfect alignment. There's nothing clichéd, predictable, routine or degenerate. Also, in my view, it's miles and miles away from the much later Venetian operas that he wrote – I know those are good, but to me they come from a different world.'

Everyone agrees that the later Venetian operas *Il ritorno d'Ulisse* and *L'incoronazione di Poppea* are problematic in all sorts of respects. The sketchiness of the sole Vienna manuscript copy of *Ulisse* and the extensive discrepancies between the contradictory Venice and Naples manuscripts of *Poppea* (not to mention legitimate doubts about how much of the extant music is actually by Monteverdi), mean that we are unlikely to ever find perfect solutions to all of the problems and questions that they raise. Gardiner is looking forward to revisiting the late Venetian operas on tour with semi-staged concert performances. 'I think there are unmistakeable fingerprints of Monteverdi's style, such as his exploration of the whole range of human emotions and this wonderful way he has with words whilst still thinking contrapuntally,' he says. 'In the late Venetian operas, his two-part writing for voice and *basso continuo* line has this constructive friction. Venetian music in the 1630s and '40s becomes tuneful and popular, and Monteverdi goes along with that as well, but there is always a much grittier type of symbiosis between text and music. But you know, musicologists can get themselves into a tremendous kind of fuss and tangle about all this, so let's just accept the fact that public opera in Venice was often a collaborative process. Monteverdi was getting on in years, and could well have turned to his collaborators – just as painters did at the time – to fill in certain sections.' After this year's extensive Monteverdian touring, Gardiner plans to record *Ulisse* for SDG. 'The opera is often traduced in performances because either it's done in a ridiculously over-composed kind of way with lots of additional instruments and extra accompaniments, as if the conductor is terrified that the music might not be good enough to sustain our interest, or you get the hair-shirt approach, which is scrupulously as written, with just a continuo line and short little ritornellos played by strings – but this also neglects what I think is really critical: that there should be tension and complicity between singers and players in order to communicate the language of the drama. That's rarely calibrated as it should be, but if you can get that right you're a long way towards understanding the originality of what Monteverdi was trying to achieve in this prodigious work.'

WHY OUR FASCINATION CONTINUES

The abundant discography of Monteverdi's madrigals, church music and operas encapsulates the variety of approaches and ideologies about performance in the modern history of the early music revival. It seems like we know as much about Monteverdi as we might ever know, unless we are fortunate enough for long-lost works to be rediscovered: compositions such as the Mantuan operas *Arianna* (1608) and *Andromeda* (1620), Requiem music commissioned by the Florentines in Venice to mourn the death of Grand Duke Cosimo II of Tuscany (1621), music for a performance of Tasso's play *Aminta* (Parma, 1628) and the lost Venetian operas *Proserpina*

rapita (1630) and *Le nozze d'Enea e Lavinia* (1641) all spring to mind as tantalising hints that the music he chose to publish was only the tip of the iceberg. Nevertheless, our fascination for Monteverdi seems to become more complex and compelling the deeper we look. As Gardiner sums up, 'This year's 450th anniversary celebration is a perfect moment to consider that Monteverdi is just one figure in a generation of scientists, thinkers, philosophers, musicians and painters all born in the 1560s and '70s, and all of an extraordinary quality. Galileo, Kepler, Francis Bacon, Monteverdi, Caravaggio, Rubens…they were all around together in that period, and all of them in their own ways transformed the modern world.' G

To discover top 'Monteverdi Moments' chosen by nine renowned interpreters – and to listen to our playlist – visit gramophone.co.uk

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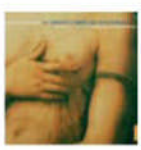
Fourth and Fifth Books of Madrigals
Consort of Musicke / Anthony Rooley
L'Oiseau-Lyre/Decca (5/86R, 9/84R)
Previous efforts are swept away by the transparency and musicianship of the Consort of Musicke's recordings of the Fourth and Fifth Books of Madrigals.



L'Orfeo
Sols; English Baroque Soloists; Monteverdi Choir / John Eliot Gardiner
DG Archiv (12/87)
Cavina's madrigalian flexibility and Parrott's integrity are both essential perspectives, but Lynne Dawson's La Musica and Anthony Rolfe Johnson's Orfeo are indispensable.



1610 Vespers
Taverner Consort, Choir and Players / Andrew Parrott
Erato (10/85)
Parrott answers difficult questions raised by the 1610 *Vespers*, and the musical qualities of his results remain outstanding in a crowded field.



Sixth Book of Madrigals
Concerto Italiano / Rinaldo Alessandrini
Naïve (8/06)
Alessandrini's *Gramophone* Award-winning recording of this serious chamber vocal music for connoisseurs (like none written before) uses the continuo part added to later reprints.



'Sweet Torment'
I Fagiolini / Robert Hollingworth
Chandos (A/09)
I Fagiolini mix up secular music from different books, including both versions of 'Zefiro torna' and a reconstruction of the original Mantuan *Il ballo delle ingrate*.



Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda. Tirsi e Clori
Tragicomedia / Stephen Stubbs
Warner (10/93)
La Venexiana's complete Books Seven and Eight are vital listening, but Tragicomedia's performances of *Combattimento* and *Tirsi e Clori* are sensational.



Selva morale e spirituale
Cantus Cölln; Concerto Palatino / Konrad Junghänel
Harmonia Mundi (A/01)
Other versions are either selective, slightly short of completeness or blighted by anachronisms, whereas Cantus Cölln's *Gramophone* Award-winning recording is top dog.



L'incoronazione di Poppea
La Venexiana / Claudio Cavina
Glossa
Cavina's whimsy gets the better of him in 'Pur ti miro', but otherwise this recording has more humour, eroticism and personality than any of the next best versions.

NEW MUSIC ON DELPHIAN



DCD34173

Scottish Awards for New Music Winner 2017

Songs and Lullabies: new works for solo cello
Robert Irvine *cello*

Inspired by the plight of disadvantaged and mistreated children around the world, Delphian artist Robert Irvine has commissioned 18 new pieces for solo cello. As a musician who works at the heart of the English and Scottish scenes, he is able to draw on an impressive roster of friends and colleagues that includes some of the UK's leading composers. Each of them has contributed a short solo piece, drawing out the cello's most lyrical aspects, while Irvine's own startling alertness to the finest expressive nuance further enhances this unique recording project.

Winner in the EVM 'Recorded New Work' category at the inaugural Scottish Awards for New Music 2017



DCD34175

Buxton Orr: Songs
Nicky Spence *tenor*, Iain Burnside *piano*, Jordan Black *clarinet*, Nikita Naumov *double bass*, Edinburgh Quartet

When Nicky Spence was first shown the score to 'The Boy in the Train', the last of Buxton Orr's *Songs of a Childhood*, he was transported to the late 1980s – his own childhood in Scotland. 'Something about Buxton's sense of humour, excitement and honesty resonated with me,' Spence says, 'and fed my desire to discover more about his work. On contacting his widow, I was led to a treasure trove of unrecorded works for voice.' Sometimes thrillingly complex and always beautiful, and given character and verve by Orr's delightful setting of the Scots language, this rich body of work has finally found a worthy modern-day advocate.

'A revelation. Imagine a gentler, quirkier Britten with dabblings in 12-tone technique and old Scots poems set to generous vocal lines and off-piste instrumentation … Spence himself sounds terrific throughout – nimble, direct, deftly playful and expressive with the text'
— The Guardian, March 2017



DCD34185

EMAP

The Edge of Time: Palaeolithic bone flutes from France & Germany
Anna Friederike Potengowski *bone flutes*, Georg Wieland Wagner *percussion*

The fourth volume in Delphian's pioneering collaboration with the European Music Archaeology Project features reconstructions of four prehistoric bone flutes which, dating from up to 40,000 years ago, represent the oldest evidence of musical creation worldwide. Flautist Anna Friederike Potengowski has studied the instruments and their possible playing techniques, and together with percussionist Georg Wieland Wagner has created a compelling programme of music in which contemporary modes of expression absorb and are reshaped by echoes from the edge of time. The album includes new compositions by Potengowski and Wagner as well as a unique interpretation of John Cage's *Ryoanji*.

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MULTI-TASKING MUSICIAN

For his new recording, the Royal Northern Sinfonia's music director **Lars Vogt** is relishing conducting Beethoven's concertos from the piano , says **Lindsay Kemp**

'This is a *beautiful* city!' breathes Lars Vogt in answer to my question about the place which is now his home for eight weeks of the year. 'I really like it! It has a great spirit to it. The Sage is gorgeous, and the development along the river here. There are good places to eat. Culturally it's very alive.'

He is talking, of course, about Gateshead, where in 2015 the then 45-year-old – described by our own Stephen Plaistow as 'the most interesting of current native German pianists by some distance' – became music director of the Royal Northern Sinfonia. He is not the first prominent instrumental soloist to take up the role: his predecessor was the violinist Thomas Zehetmair; before him, in the '90s, was the pianist Jean-Bernard Pommier; and before that the cellist Heinrich Schiff. Vogt has an idea why it keeps happening like this.

'They do like the great conductors coming here, but maybe with us it's the chamber music feeling they get from playing concertos, which they then want to take on into symphonies.'

This is Vogt's first permanent conducting post, and he certainly values the co-operative chamber music feeling himself. 'I've conducted quite a few orchestras now, and I have to say that the attitude here is absolutely unique. I can't find a single person with a negative attitude. Usually in an orchestra, there are at least two or three people who have sort of given up, or who like to make a few comments to make life difficult. That *never* happens here. If anything, it's them coming up to me and asking, "Can we go into a little more detail?", or, "Can you nag us more? We want to be as good as we possibly can." That's the attitude of great artists, and I want to give them all I can in return.'



PHOTOGRAPHY: MARK SAVAGE; ANNA RESZNIAK

We are talking in his office deep inside The Sage, the gleaming arts centre which opened in 2004 high above the Tyne as part of the Gateshead Quays development on the south side of the river. Vogt has just spent the afternoon directing the RNS from the keyboard in a rehearsal of Beethoven's *Emperor* Concerto, which they will be performing the next day (alongside Johann Strauss II's *Emperor Waltz* and Dvořák's Fifth Symphony) and recording at the same time for the first volume of a cycle of the Beethoven piano concertos – all to be recorded for Ondine in the course of the current season. 'I've had these concertos in my repertoire for more than 20 years', he says, 'and was always waiting for the moment when I knew what I wanted to say with them, and had sorted out all the little ways I'd been failing with them before. When I understood how spontaneous this orchestra was, and how immediately I could work with them, I knew this was the right moment.'

'I always stay after my concerto and watch the rest of the concert too. It's polite to the orchestra and the conductor, but also you can learn so much'

Sadly, the windowless office with its piano, scattered scores and basic tea-making equipment is a poor reflection of the soaring stainless steel and glass of the public part of the building, with its panoramic view across the water to central Newcastle framed by the Tyne bridge on the left and the Gateshead Millenium Bridge on the right. Neither does it echo the honeyed-oak look of the main auditorium. Yet Vogt's hazel-coloured eyes are burning bright; it seems the music-making is what keeps him happy. His relationship with the RNS began back in the '90s with one of his first concerto dates after winning second prize at the 1990 Leeds International Piano Competition. The conductor then was Schiff. 'I learned a lot from him. I was young, he treated me as an equal. I was so grateful.' Then there were a couple of concerts and a tour in the Zehetmair years ('brilliant fun'), before the orchestra gave him one of his own early dates as a conductor. 'I was in my third year of trying out as a conductor, and I thought, "This is really nice, this is what it is supposed to be like." They don't mind if I put crazy ideas and visions out there. I quite like to work with images rather than technical descriptions, and with them I'd put out an idea and they wouldn't laugh at it, but really take it on board. There are some orchestras, very good ones, who want to know exactly what's going to happen musically, and if anything changes they're unhappy. Here, it's all about being open to the spirit of the moment. I felt this all happened right away with them. And do you know, even before the concert happened, my agent was up here and had a meeting with them, and she told me: "They like you. They like you a lot. They want you to be their music director." From one concert!'

It sounds like a lucky landing for Vogt; not every would-be pianist-conductor enjoys such immediate approval. But then he has had plenty of opportunity to study full-time conductors at work. Among those he admires, and who in some cases have given him encouragement and advice, Vogt lists Sir Simon Rattle, Christian Thielemann, Paavo Järvi, Daniel Harding, Manfred Honneck and Robin Ticciati. 'When my dad retired he did some research and counted up the number of conductors I've worked with; it was 220! So I've seen a *lot* of conductors, and whether or not you learn something from them doesn't always depend on how famous they are. I always stay after my



Vogt has found a kinship with the RNS: 'I can let them do a lot of things on their own. Often the result is better if we allow ourselves a dialogue without me interfering'

concerto and watch the rest of the concert too. It's polite to the orchestra and the conductor, but also you can learn so much.'

The route into the job for Vogt, however, came as a natural and unplanned extension of play-directing. 'I have to say that conducting was always a secret passion of mine. I sometimes did a little and then put it away. Then about five or six years ago I stepped in at the very last minute with Camerata Salzburg in the Beethoven Third Concerto, and we only had time for one run-through before the concert. There was no conductor, just a very good concertmaster, and it was so much fun, so easy. I rang my agent afterwards from the taxi to the airport and said, "I *need* to know how far I can go with this. It doesn't matter which orchestra it's with, I just love it so much."'

'When you play-conduct, you don't have time to think about musical problems coming up – I find that makes things easier'

Vogt's play-directing has since encompassed not just Mozart and Beethoven, but the Schumann and Grieg concertos, even Brahms's Second. So what is the attraction of doubling your workload in this way? Apart from the strange thing of the fingertips going a little numb in the course of conducting an opening orchestral tutti, Vogt sees few difficulties, and some strong positives. 'It's like chamber music,' he says. 'Eye contact, really direct communication.' I mention that I have seen some piano directors who feel they must beat time whenever their hands are not on the keyboard, but that watching Vogt in the rehearsal I noticed that, while he is hardly still in the orchestral tuttis, his gestures are more broad and general. 'A good orchestra doesn't need time-beating,' is his response. 'I'm much more attracted to the idea of getting something going and then not interfering. Beating everything can disturb the natural flow or sense of breathing. Instead I want to encourage the character of the music, encourage people to go to their limits of expression and ideally get them to the state that they *want* to do that, enjoy searching to the depths. The motivational side is half the job of conducting. With the RNS, I know them well already, so often I find that even if theoretically I could show them something, I don't have to. I can really let them do a lot of things on their own. Often the result is a lot better if we allow ourselves a dialogue without me interfering.'

Vogt actually finds it an advantage to be directing from the piano. 'When I am working on a concerto with a conductor and basically sitting and waiting for my turn, of course I try to be "in the music". But there's a danger when you've already experienced play-conducting that you will move along too much with the music, when really you have to let the conductor and orchestra do that while you think instead about your next entry. When you play-conduct you don't have time to think about musical problems coming up, and I find that if anything that makes things easier. It only becomes more difficult where there's a real contrast, when the orchestra is in definite opposition to the piano. I haven't done Beethoven No 4 yet, and I wonder what I will do in that slow movement where what the orchestra is doing is *so* opposite. Maybe we'll find a way for me to initiate it and then sort of "hand it over" and be a different character. That could be a challenge but, then again, in a piano sonata you have to switch between different characters all the time, so I'm hoping that perhaps it will be all right.'

Interestingly, the *Emperor* rehearsal I have just been watching was largely wordless, not least because it was also being recorded as a 'pre-patching' safety session for the next day's live version. Instead of instructions and lectures from the front, what I saw was the odd discussion, but mainly intense work and calm concentration. Yet release is what Vogt seeks, and seems to get. 'For Beethoven, they need to be able to explode in the moment,' he says, 'and they need to be able to be so manic, so revolutionary, so poetic, so intimate, and at times so angry and so bursting with a joy that's almost frightening.'

And that's just in the Fifth Concerto! Vogt laughs. 'Well, we're very lucky as pianists to have these five Beethoven concertos. They're absolutely central, each one different in its way. Somebody once said Beethoven is like a Hohlspiegel, a converging mirror which gathers things from all times and reflects them back on each other. He was mixing influences from the past with things that are so modern that we're still struggling to understand them now. Claudio Arrau once said that all Beethoven's music is a struggle to victory, and he was right. Sometimes the victory is inward, not necessarily a triumphant ending but a struggle towards a clear understanding of something. It may be a psychological inner victory, but it's always there. Maybe that's what Beethoven added to the godlike Mozart; when Mozart was in pain, he was in *real* pain, expressing an appreciation of the world as it is, the beauty of what we have. With Beethoven, ego comes in, but in a good way. He's saying, "I can do things, I can overcome Fate, my powers can become a revolution." That's an amazing message to give in music.'

The first CD in the cycle, of Concertos Nos 1 and 5, certainly does much to illustrate the journey Beethoven made. 'There's a sense that the Beethoven concertos are standing on each other's shoulders,' reckons Vogt. 'In "No 1" – which of course was not his first concerto – you see already what he's learned from "No 2", but the language gets more daring in some ways and the scale is bigger. Then in No 3 the Beethoven we know has really arrived. We're in his favourite tonality, C minor, and there's a real struggle to gain C major at the end, but in the middle the slow movement is in E major, his "heavenly" key; its first chord is unbelievable, suddenly we're in outer space. The Fourth Concerto is possibly one of the most genius pieces of all time, maybe the concerto with the most storytelling, the most psychology. It's heartbreaking how those few piano chords at the beginning are answered by the orchestra already in a faraway key; then there's the incredible modern-music experiment of the slow movement with those *unisono* furies attacking the poor piano, who just answers with quiet prayers. And in the finale we meet the first real *forte*, the first time the orchestra liberates itself from all the searching and suffering that was there before, all leading to an unbelievable triumph – mankind forcing itself to victory and freedom.'

And No 5, which he and the RNS have just been rehearsing? 'I have to admit, No 5 is the one that took me the longest to understand, just because of the simplicity of the harmonic movement. There's so much simple tonic-subdominant-dominant, or even just tonic-dominant-tonic, that you are left thinking, "Has he gone mad?" But that's the whole point. If it can be injected with the joy and energy of Beethoven, suddenly for a tonic to reach a dominant can sound like a major achievement, and notes that are outside the normal harmonic scale acquire greater importance. This is the kind of thing a genius can do: take a simple idea, give it a tweak, and suddenly we're on the dark side of the universe.' G

▶ Lars Vogt's release of Concertos Nos 1 and 5 will be reviewed in the next issue

PHOTOGRAPHY: ANNA RESZNIAK







PHOTOGRAPHY: FELIX BROEDE

Following her GUT INSTINCT

Recording the Franck Violin Sonata on gut strings with a historic piano was a gamble for **Isabelle Faust** – but it's one that has paid off, says **Charlotte Gardner**

Confession time. Franck's Violin Sonata is a piece I've known since my teens and yet have always been a bit, well, vanilla about; lyrical and passionate though it is, it's a work that for me has always represented a curious mixture of too much and not enough, even in the good recordings; a little too heavy in weight, and even with all that soaring passion still feeling as though a final emotional something is missing.

I say this to give you an idea of exactly what the unglamorous little grey WAV file containing the advance audio of Isabelle Faust and Alexander Melnikov's new recording was up against when it landed in my computer with no temptingly glossy cover artwork, or indeed an explanatory press release, to smooth its path. So the fact that my first click has now been filed in my internal log of musical lightbulb moments, when I've heard a piece as if for the first time and suddenly fallen for it, indicates that something here was very different. As for what, first unguided impressions were of a new softness and intimacy from the violin in the first movement. There was fragile introspection too, occasionally dark-tinged. Equally striking was the gently supportive piano, which was clearly not a Steinway.

The moment we tried the Erard, it became clear. There's more air in the textures – it's not just one big stormy inarticulate thing

And indeed it's not a Steinway, as Faust confirms when I sit with her that evening in an upstairs room at Wigmore Hall, she and Andreas Staier having performed a Brahms and Schumann sonata recital there earlier in the day. Instead it's an Erard of the period, with Faust herself on gut strings; a set-up not previously heard on a Franck Sonata recording, but the kind of historical performance 'first' that Faust is very much known for (much as she and her 'Sleeping Beauty' Stradivarius are equally likely to be found with metal strings and repertoire from the past century). Recent historical projects include, in 2015, the first period recording of the Schumann concerto with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra and Pablo Heras-Casado, who themselves had never before ventured so far into the 19th century with their historical performance. Then there was her complete Mozart concertos recording last year with Giovanni Antonini and Il Giardino Armonico, every single concerto on that recording leaping out from the stereo with its own individual character. The Wigmore recital that day has been another case in point, opening with a spellbindingly intense reading of the additional-violin version of CPE Bach's *Fantasie* in F sharp minor, Faust using a Baroque bow even with metal strings and the Steinway.

'I changed for the Bach because even with the Steinway the modern Tourte doesn't feel right,' she explains when I comment on it – and indeed it was finally 'feeling right' that brought her and Melnikov, her most regular duo partner, into the recording studio with the Franck, a work to which she'd given a wide berth for years, both on stage and in the recording studio.

'There are so many recordings of this piece, and for a long time I thought, why another one?', she reasons. 'You have to give the recording business some kind of logic. The Franck is also a sonata you play so many times as a student, and with these really well-known pieces it's sometimes good if you then don't play them for several years so that you can return to them not only with fresh feelings, but also with a more critical approach to performance tradition. So that's what Alexander and I did, and then we began programming it.'

This re-engagement process began and then continued with a Steinway, but one day, as they rehearsed the sonata at Melnikov's house for another

programme, their own lightbulb moment came. 'Alexander has several historical instruments at his home, and we just suddenly said, "We're being ridiculous here, we should try it on your Erard",' Faust recalls. 'So we just played a few bars, and it was a revelation. Immediately a lot of the technical problems were explained, most particularly those of balance and transparency. The piano part is almost a piano concerto in itself – there are so many notes, and this always creates a problem because the pianist can never play out with the Steinway, or the rest would just be drowned. The moment we were on the Erard, though, it suddenly became clear why the piece is written in this way, because the pianist can actually go for it and the violin can still cope. There's also a bit more air in the textures; it's not just one big stormy inarticulate thing.' She concludes: 'We said then that if we ever recorded it, it would have to be on gut strings with a historic piano. That would be our reason to do it, and that's what's on the recording.'



Pioneers: Faust and Melnikov have taken a historical approach to the Franck Sonata

Balance issues gone, Faust's own approach to the sonata followed naturally. 'We just tried to take advantage of the new transparency you get with this instrument and the gut strings,' she says matter-of-factly. 'It's of course a very stormy sonata at times, but the first movement is such an elegiac movement, and you can really go into something very dreamy and in a way precious. I think every note has its own little flower, and if you go straight for the violinistic juicy thing then I think you miss out on something.'

Then came the question of what to pair the Franck with on the recording. Plan A had been to find something 'a bit more edgy, to avoid emphasising its sugary side'. However, Ernest Chausson's unusually scored Concerto for Violin, Piano and String Quartet then crossed their minds. 'At first we thought, "Ah, well that's a very sugary piece too",' Faust begins, 'but then it occurred to us that actually it was a piece that had exactly the same problem on modern instruments, and so was likely to be another piece that would sound very different in this historical context.' She breaks off with a peal of laughter. 'In fact, it's almost worse than the Franck, with what the piano has to do. It's really a lot of notes! It's a very individual piece; Baroque ideas in the second movement, and then come these megalomaniac places where the piano has I don't know how many notes, then mega-generous lines in the violin, and then suddenly all the violins in unison…It's a piece of extremes, but it also has a lot of very touching naivity, I think. I have a soft spot for it. Then we were lucky to find the Salagon Quartet, who were both happy and able to play on gut strings, and also happy only to participate for this one piece in which they have a rather strange role to fulfil, because sometimes it's kind of orchestral, and at other times they have something far more soloistic.'

The fact that it is such a unique piece presented its own interesting conundrum during the recording session. 'The sound engineers had no idea how to do it at first,' remembers Faust, 'particularly when the string quartet has such different roles to play. So it took a little while to work out how we should all be positioned, how I would sound in comparison to them, where to put the mics, and it was actually quite exciting to try out. We ended up with me standing in the middle of the quartet, with the piano behind.'

The Franck and Chausson is by no means the only recording project Faust has in the pipeline. Also on the cards for the autumn is a recording of Bach's Violin and Harpsichord Sonatas with Kristian Bezuidenhout. 'This is repertoire that's really naturally embraced by the public, even with it not being performed in concert so often,' she says. 'I can't imagine anyone better than Kristian to record it with either. We've done it for many years together, and this will actually be his first recording on harpsichord, which is funny because he started off on the harpsichord before he even got into his fortepiano studies.' Interestingly, there's a slight parallel to be drawn between the Bach and last year's Mozart concertos. 'The Mozart concertos recording was wonderful work and also one of the most difficult projects,' she remembers. 'They were almost entirely written in the same year, so although they are all different, they're still from the same period, and the moment you do all five at once it becomes really tricky to figure out and highlight each specific character.' She continues: 'Likewise with the Bach. Although each sonata has a very different character, the differences aren't as immediately obvious as they are with the solo sonatas. You have to really listen in carefully to the details.' The recording has also given her the opportunity to utilise her collection of Baroque bows, switching between different models even between movements. 'Longer ones for slow movements, and for the faster movements a shorter bow which is a bit quicker in its response and more articulate,' she says. Faust and Melnikov will also be back in the recording studio in the summer, for the complete Mozart sonatas – Melnikov on his own Walter copy.

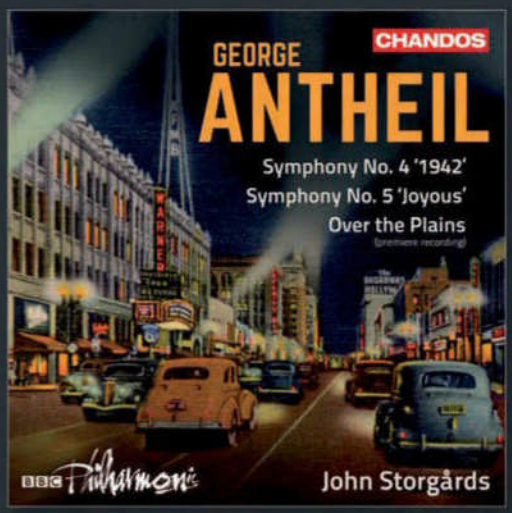
It's a recordings list that trumpets the sheer range of repertoire Faust thoughtfully embraces. That range was further underlined the following week when I heard her again at Wigmore Hall, this time with Melnikov, in a programme bookended by two extraordinarily contrasting contemporaneous works: an exquisite reading of Szymanowski's *Myths* of 1921 to open, and then to conclude, Antheil's Violin Sonata No 2 of 1923 with its accompaniment of piano and drums – an eccentric rarity on the concert platform whose comically bombastic ending brought the house down. Proof, if any were needed, that you never know what Isabelle Faust will do next. G

▶ To read Gramophone's review of the Franck and Chausson, turn to page 54

PHOTOGRAPHY: BENJAMIN KRIEG

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May Releases



Disc of the Month

Antheil: Orchestral Works, Vol. 1

BBC Philharmonic | John Storgårds

This new series with the BBC Philharmonic and its chief guest conductor, John Storgårds, focuses on the works of George Antheil. Known as the 'bad boy of music', he began by composing shockingly avant-garde works, but then moved towards a fundamentally tonal and melody-based idiom, becoming one of the great US symphonists. This series documents the evolution of his musical style, the war-inspired Fourth Symphony and 'joyous' Fifth featured here clearly representing the compositional shift. They are complemented with the premiere recording of the memorable Texas-inspired *Over the Plains*.

CHAN 10941



Haydn
Piano Sonatas, Vol. 6

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet

The multi-award winning pianist has now reached Volume 6 in his highly praised Haydn series. This album presents five sonatas, 'not among the most well known. But what treasures they conceal!', as Bavouzet declares, from the imposing early No. 11 to the later Nos 36 and 43, each opening up a whole new world in Haydn's music.

CHAN 10942



Strauss in St Petersburg

Cheerful marches and dances here trace the career of Johann Strauss II as it manifested itself in his acclaimed summer seasons in St Petersburg. The album offers a rare collection of lively works and celebrates the ninetieth year of the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra and the eightieth birthday of its principal conductor, Neeme Järvi.

CHAN 10937



Maestro Corelli's Violins

Collegium Musicum 90 | Simon Standage

The musical influence of the famous Arcangelo Corelli is witnessed in these recordings of unjustly neglected concertos by three of his pupils. The stylistic range of these works is captured by the period instruments of the critically acclaimed Collegium Musicum 90 under the direction of its founder, Simon Standage, also a soloist here.

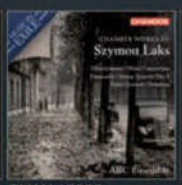
CHAN 0818

JUNE 2017 RELEASES



CHAN 241-57

Busoni
BBC Philharmonic
Neeme Järvi



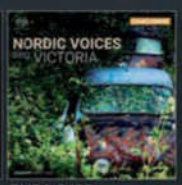
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GRAMOPHONE
RECORDING OF THE MONTH

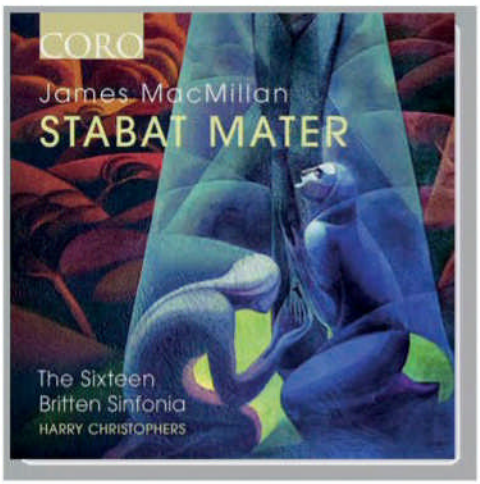
Marc Rochester is overwhelmed by The Sixteen's account of James MacMillan's moving and deeply personal new setting of the Stabat mater

MacMillan

Stabat mater

The Sixteen; Britten Sinfonia / Harry Christophers

Coro Ⓕ COR16150 (60' • DDD • T/t)



In their separate but extremely effusive booklet essays, both Harry Christophers and the work's dedicatee, John Studzinski, describe James MacMillan's *Stabat mater* as a 'masterpiece'. There is much on this CD to substantiate that claim, but without doubt the work's impact is immeasurably heightened by the exceptional performance it receives here from the same forces which gave its world premiere in the Barbican last October.

The work owes its existence to the longstanding relationship between The Sixteen and James MacMillan. In 2001 the first ever new commission from The Sixteen was MacMillan's *O bone Jesu*, and eight years later they gave the first-performance of his *Miserere*. On top of that, Christophers (the dedicatee of the *Miserere*) clearly has huge admiration for MacMillan's sacred works, writing that 'James ranks amongst a trio of truly great composers of sacred music, the other two being Tomás Luis de Victoria and Francis Poulenc'. Christophers's adoration of MacMillan's *Stabat mater* radiates out of every moment of this compelling performance.

Along with John Studzinski and his Genesis Foundation, Harry Christophers and The Sixteen have been encouraging living composers to set the *Stabat mater* on the grounds that, although it is one of the most powerful of all liturgical poems, it seems to have fallen out of favour in recent times. They point to just two notable settings from the 20th century, by Szymanowski and Poulenc. Three 21st-century composers with very different musical outlooks were invited to contribute settings, with MacMillan serving as a kind of composer-mentor, and the project culminated with MacMillan's own extended setting of the text.

'There is a tantalising moment where the choir effectively slides out of sight while the violins swarm up in a haze of fluttering torment'



'A truly great composer of sacred music' – Harry Christophers on James MacMillan

As you would expect from a composer whose Catholicism is such a powerful force in his creative process, this is a deeply personal setting. This is immediately evident from the impassioned, closely knit shimmering strings which create an unmistakable aura of anguish at the very opening of the work. That is not, however, what actually opens the disc. It is prefaced by The Sixteen intoning with eloquent gracefulness the ancient plainchant that presents in timelessly concentrated form the entire text MacMillan has set, and which also provides the basis for much of his own melodic material.

MacMillan divides the work into four distinct sections, each with its own particular musical character in reflection of the essence of the text, and his instinctive understanding of the power of music to express emotions beyond the text is perhaps the most compelling feature of this new setting. Otherwise, all the hallmarks of his style are here; the juxtaposition of aggressive, angry dissonances with almost naively innocent melodies, sliding tonalities, cluster chords, jagged, sparring rhythms and, most potently, a melding of sung text and orchestral texture. Many of the most intense moments come when the choir disappears and we are left with purely orchestral imagery. There is a tantalising moment at 9'36" of track 2 where the choir effectively slides out of sight while the violins swarm up in a haze of fluttering torment.

The Britten Sinfonia have tremendously incisive rhythmic



The Sixteen sound 'almost as if they are a single living, breathing entity', with the Britten Sinfonia and Harry Christophers

PHOTOGRAPHY: PHILIP GATWARD, PHILIPPA GEDGE

bite – their jagged chords four minutes into the first section have almost percussive violence to them – and other effects, such as the swarming high violins at 9'04" in the 'Sancta mater, istud agas' (track 4) signifying the lamentations at the foot of the cross, are executed with a hair-raising fervency. Against this the ethereal violin solo at 8'15" in track 3, revealing its ancestry in the pastoral writing of Vaughan Williams, is positively mouth-watering in its loveliness.

We are so used to the excellence of The Sixteen that we are in danger of taking the supreme quality of their work for granted. But the closely knit choral clusters, ethereally drawn together with a remarkable unity of tone, and the intense, fervid textures, astonishingly nuanced, almost as if they are a single living, breathing entity, put them in a class of their own.

It is also dangerously easy to underestimate the consummate skill with which Harry Christophers balances and moulds the choral sound. From deep within this wonderfully homogeneous sonority, the solo voices emerge almost imperceptibly. All the soloists are outstanding; but if I were to single out one, it must be soprano Julie Cooper, who in the early stages of the second part effortlessly ascends to stratospheric heights in representation of Mary's anguish.

Posterity might well judge this to be a 21st-century masterpiece; there is no question that this is a truly masterly recorded performance. **Marc Rochester**

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Editor's Choice
Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



David Threasher relishes Giovanni Antonini's Haydn:

'The orchestral performance is breathtaking in its accuracy – the sort of Haydn-playing you dream of' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 37



Jed Distler enjoys Sokolov's live Mozart and Rachmaninov:

'Sokolov fans have long considered the pianist's 1995 Proms performance of Rachmaninov's Third a holy grail' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 41

Beethoven

Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 15; No 2, Op 19

Yevgeny Sudbin *pf*

Tapiola Sinfonietta / Osmo Vänskä

BIS Ⓕ SACD BIS2078 (63' • DDD/DSD)



Let me lay out information first of all: this is the conclusion of Yevgeny Sudbin's cycle of the five Beethoven concertos that began, back to front, with an issue of Nos 4 and 5 together (4/11) and continued with a coupling of No 3 in C minor with the Mozart C minor Concerto (No 24), K491 (5/14). Osmo Vänskä has been the conductor throughout, with the Tapiola Sinfonietta here and previously with the Minnesota Orchestra. I note for now that the first CD was received with enthusiasm and was an Editor's Choice; the next, in which No 3 was paired with the Mozart, fared less well.

It is impossible to hold back from admiration for Sudbin in whatever he plays, thanks to his brilliance and hallmark exuberance. He has much to say and he wants us to listen. You may feel the hyperactive style he brings to the outer movements of these concertos is just what they require. I am not so sure. The exuberance, for me, tips over to a cat-on-hot-bricks manner that too often seems a default position and wearisome. 'Halt,' I want to cry, 'couldn't you please occasionally calm down a bit?' Need *sforzato* accents always be like touches of a whip and scales the length of a piece of string? Vänskä and the orchestra are willing partners. I resist too their bass-heavy sound world, built around microphone placements, which projects a nervy, fidgety view of dynamics in which a level is rarely sustained for its full term. Try the opening of the C major Concerto (No 1) – marked *pianissimo* until a crescendo leads into the first *fortissimo* at bar 16 – as an example of what I mean. To me, this is so much more exciting if the very quiet martial energy at the beginning is held taut. It's the sort of detail a great conductor with a major orchestra and demanding soloist will agree upon and get right.

Oh dear, I'm sounding grouchy. I want the prospect of admiring Sudbin as much in Beethoven as in Scarlatti and Scriabin; but it is not there. He is sparky and generous with impulses and good ideas, but restless. The *Largo* of the C major Concerto, the longest slow movement in all the concertos, shows how the best of 'early' Beethoven is every bit as characteristic as the later, with an appreciation, in this instance, of the clarinet and solo writing for it that he never surpassed. I treated myself to Sony Classical's box of Sviatoslav Richter's complete live and studio recordings for RCA and Columbia; seek it out if you can for the performance he gave with Charles Munch and the Boston SO of this concerto in November 1960. Yes, from way back, I know, but incomparable.

Beethoven's pupil Carl Czerny remarked that the master 'brings out difficulties and effects on the piano that we could never have imagined'. Yevgeny Sudbin at his best is an artist capable of reminding us of that and there is plentiful evidence in these rondo finales. Don't get me started on his cadenzas. They ignore all the material Beethoven left for Concerto No 1, which he finds wanting in various ways, playing in the first and last movements cadenzas of his own ('based on Friedheim'). Suffer them if you can; I couldn't possibly comment.

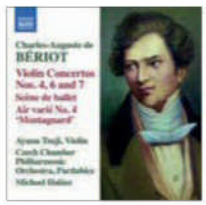
There's a mistranslation in the booklet of the German note which makes a nonsense of where the cadenza comes in the first movement of the B flat Concerto (No 2). **Stephen Plaistow**

Bériot

Violin Concertos – No 4, Op 46; No 6, Op 70; No 7, Op 76. Air varié No 4, 'Montagnard', Op 5. Scène de ballet, Op 100

Ayana Tsuji *vn* **Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra, Pardubice / Michael Halász**

Naxos Ⓜ 8 573734 (69' • DDD)



It's extraordinary how potent cheap music is. So goes that delicious quote of Noël Coward's, and perhaps rather naughtily it's these words that pop into my head when listening to these mid-19th-century violin concertos by the Belgian violin virtuoso Charles Bériot.

This may have been the era of Mendelssohn but it was also the era of virtuoso showmanship, exemplified by the 1837 keyboard duel in Paris between Liszt and Thalberg, and it's in this context that I can't help but hear Bériot's violin concertos. First there's their abundance of double-stops, ricochet bowing, harmonics and the rest. Then there's their tuneful, frothily passionate melodies, which recall the Italian operatic world inhabited by Bériot's lover, later wife, the Spanish operatic diva Maria Malibran (although in an interesting circle back to Mendelssohn, the German composer actually wrote an aria accompanied by a violin solo for the couple).

As it happens, I suspect this would still have proved to be an entertaining romp had the recording itself been perfectly executed, but frustratingly this latest release in Naxos's Bériot concertos series displays a distinct lack of polish. To a slightly thick background acoustic, add an often slightly rough-edged sound from the Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra under Michael Halász, along with the odd intonation glitch. Then, while violinist Ayana Tsuji has caught the operatic diva mood of these pieces and made neat work of their technical fireworks, her playing sometimes bears the intonational hallmarks of a less than luxurious recording situation. Her violin often also has a slightly shrill quality, which this repertoire only accentuates.

While this disc certainly provides an interesting snapshot of a musical era, given its flaws I'm not sure I'd want to collect the whole set. **Charlotte Gardner**



Dennis Russell Davies conducts works by Bernstein and Glass, with violinist Renaud Capuçon

Bernstein · Glass

Bernstein Serenade After Plato's Symposium
Glass Violin Concerto No 1
Renaud Capuçon *vn*
Bruckner Orchestra, Linz / Dennis Russell Davies
Orange Mountain Music Ⓕ OMM0114 (64' • DDD)



Glass and Bernstein may not trip off the tongue quite as easily as Bach and Handel or Haydn and Mozart, but bringing them together here via two large-scale works for solo violin and orchestra encourages some parallels to be drawn. As composers, both successfully synthesised elements of classical and popular, high and low, developing direct and accessible musical languages that appealed to a much wider and broader listenership.

Unlike Glass, whose prolific output has been the result of a life dedicated primarily to composition, Bernstein divided his time between conducting and composing. His *Serenade After Plato's Symposium*, composed in 1954, displays all the hallmarks of a composer intimately familiar not only with the orchestra's light and shade, colours and textures, but also keenly aware of the delicate and fine-grained balance required between soloist and orchestra for a concerto to function effectively.

Based on Plato's philosophical text, which presents different responses by seven Greek philosophers to the question 'what is the nature of true love?', Bernstein's five-movement design also adopts the format of a dramatic dialogue. The first movement contrasts Phaedrus's passionate opening remarks on love's creative and destructive potential with Pausanias's more playful treatment of the subject. Each philosophical approach is given a different musical character, from Eryximachus's energetic claims that love is omniscient to Socrates and Alcibiades' extended discussions on the physical and cerebral forms of beauty that close the work. Violinist Renaud Capuçon's brilliantly judged performance is highly responsive to the work's musical and philosophical nuances and especially powerful in conveying the emotional intensity of the fourth movement ('Agathon').

The same cannot be said about the Glass concerto. Richard Guérin's booklet-notes refer to a remark made by the conductor Dennis Russell Davies that, in composing the concerto, the challenge of balancing a large orchestra with solo violin proved difficult for Glass. This may be true; but the composer cannot be blamed for the violin's lack of presence and penetration in the first movement. To be sure, Capuçon's violin soars high above a descending chaconne bass in the slow middle movement, creating a beautifully glowing sonic halo. However, a rather limp final movement lacks the drive and sharpness of Gidon Kremer's impressive recording with Christoph von Dohnányi and the Vienna Philharmonic. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Glass – selected comparison:
Kremer, VPO, Dohnányi (10/93) (DG)
437 091-2GH, 445 185-2GH or 479 3434GTC

Brahms

Serenades – No 1, Op 11; No 2, Op 16
Gävle Symphony Orchestra / Jaime Martín
Ondine Ⓕ ODE1291-2 (73' • DDD)



First impressions are wholly positive. Without sounding uncultivated, the Gävle Symphony Orchestra catch nicely the outdoorsy good humour of the D major First Serenade's opening melody, shared to

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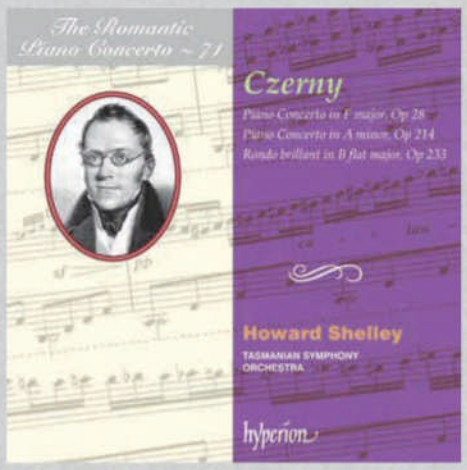
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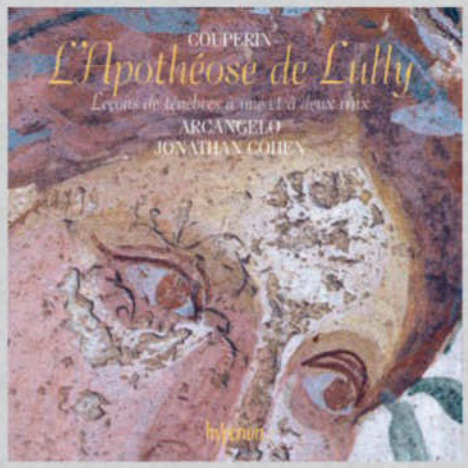
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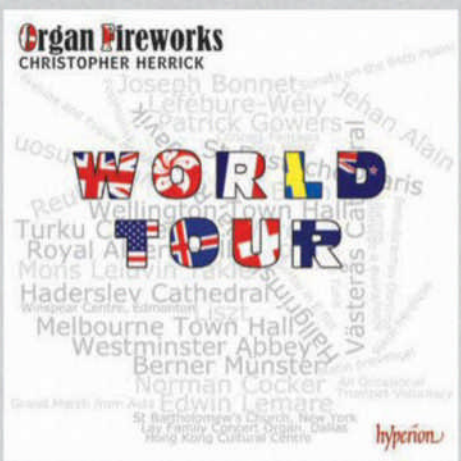
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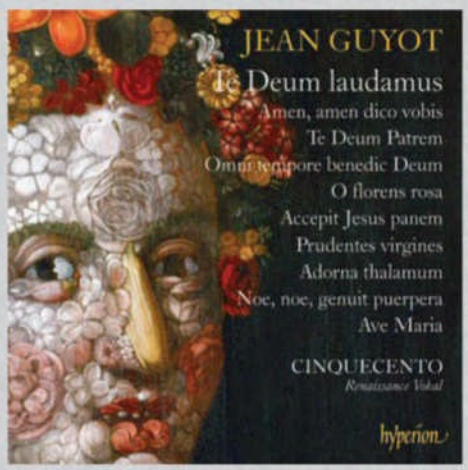
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an earthier degree by the second theme of the Scherzo, as if it belonged to Nielsen or Stenhammar. I like the Gävle strings' trenchant leap into the development section, and they maintain a fine control of those oscillating figures that in serene altitude are now more associated with Bruckner, and in the bass, Dvořák. Only when turning to the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and Claudio Abbado in that Scherzo do other aspects of the music shyly emerge: hesitant, interior qualities, a burr to the violas' phrases which question and counter the silvery legato of the violins and flutes.

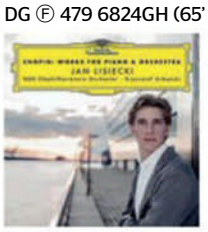
Jaime Martín is not seeking (or at least does not find) hidden depths in the *Adagio*, which flows in unaffected fashion at a tempo that makes better sense of the double-dotted lilt to the accompaniment than the thickly insistent tread of Abbado's first recording with the Berlin Philharmonic. The Stockholm Philharmonic and Andrew Davis show that the movement can work its magic at an even swifter tempo if the playing is truly quiet and tender.

Ondine's recording, made in the orchestra's own distinctive, flat-domed hall, allows plenty of air around music whose horn-led ebullience is rarely stilled for long. In Berlin, the Scherzo of the A major Second Serenade is a little thick-set and blurry compared to the irrepressibly buoyant solo winds in Gävle. Martín again pays heed to the *non troppo* part of the following *Adagio* passacaglia and, like Davis, throws light on any number of reference points – backwards to Beethoven and Schumann, and forwards to Brahms's own, more symphonically developed works (including the piano concertos). It's a disc to raise the spirits. **Peter Quantrill**

Serenade No 1 – selected comparisons:
BPO, Abbado (5/97R) (DG) 477 5424GTA2
Stockholm PO, A Davis (1/00) (FINL) 3984 25327-2
Mahler CO, Abbado (7/07) (DG) 476 5786GH

Chopin

Andante spianato and Grande polonaise brillante, Op 22. Rondo à la krakowiak, Op 14. Variations on 'Là ci darem la mano', Op 2. Fantasy on Polish Airs, Op 13. Nocturne No 20, Op *posth*
Jan Lisiecki *pf* **NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra / Krzysztof Urbański**
DG Ⓕ 479 6824GH (65' • DDD)



Ignoring the booklet's avowal that the works featured on this album are 'generally something of a blind-spot for music lovers today', I have only two misgivings about what is overall a very fine recording indeed. First, DG inserts a ludicrously long gap between the end of the *Andante spianato* and the opening of the *Grande polonaise brillante*. Chopin specifically wrote the *Andante* as a preface to the Polonaise, so why not present it as such instead of, as here, two separate, disconnected pieces? Second, Lisiecki, having given us an *Andante* which is truly *spianato* ('smooth', 'level', 'uniform'), plays fast and loose with the pulse of the Polonaise in its initial statement – a briefly disquieting few bars before things settle down. Rubinstein with Alfred Wallenstein in 1958 shows how to do both these things (though in now rather elderly sound).

The rest of the disc is a triumph. We can trace back to Kalkbrenner the source of the French *jeu perlé* style of playing: 'rapid, clean, even passagework where each note is bright and perfectly formed like each pearl on a necklace' (Charles Timbrell in *French Pianism*). Chopin fell, briefly, under the spell of Kalkbrenner when he first came to Paris, around the same time most of these works were written. Lisiecki's *jeu perlé* execution is a real delight. Moreover, his varied touch and tone have been superbly captured by engineer Rainer Maillard. I was equally impressed by some characterful wind solos from the newly christened NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester and by (its first principal guest conductor) Krzysztof Urbański, who makes the most of his somewhat thankless task.

But this is Lisiecki's disc. Time and again his buoyant rhythms, spontaneity and crisp articulation (try Vars 2 and 4 of the Mozart Variations – altogether the best version I've come across) married to a touching lyrical introspection (listen to his handling of the Introduzione of the *Krakowiak* Rondo) leaves some distinguished competition trailing, among them Garrick Ohlsson (Hyperion, 2/09), Idil Biret (Naxos, 4/92) and even the excellent Oleg Marshev (Danacord, 10/14). **Jeremy Nicholas**

Clementi

Symphonies – No 1, WoO32; No 2, WoO33; No 4, 'The Great National', WoO34; No 4, WoO35
Salzburg Mozarteum Orchestra / Ivor Bolton
Sony Classical Ⓑ ② 88985 30539-2 (106' • DDD)



Muzio Clementi did his posthumous reputation no favours by turning out reams of autopilot sonatinas for schoolroom use. Mozart's withering put-down ('a mere mechanicus') after their celebrated keyboard contest didn't help, either. Yet many of his later sonatas, especially, are full of individual, sometimes moving music. There's plenty to intrigue and delight, too, in these four symphonies composed for large orchestra (including trombones) during the first quarter of the 19th century and performed throughout Europe. After a concert by the London Philharmonic Society in March 1824, the *Morning Chronicle* wrote that one of Clementi's symphonies (we do not know which) 'charmed all lovers of beautiful melody and scientific contrivance'. The use of 'God save the King' in *The Great National Symphony*, No 3, made it something of a popular hit. Yet none of the symphonies seems to have reached a form that satisfied the inveterate reviser in Clementi. Alfredo Casella edited Nos 1 and 2 in the 1930s; but it was not until the late 1970s that pianist-musicologist Pietro Spada made a publishable edition of all four symphonies, drawing on not-quite-complete manuscripts scattered between the British Museum and Washington's Library of Congress.

The Italian-born Englishman was not a natural creator of vocally inspired melody. *Pace* the *Morning Chronicle*, memorable tunes are at a premium. But with a nod to late Haydn (the pastoral *Andante* of No 2 sounds like a paraphrase of Haydn's *Miracle*, No 96) and early Beethoven, Clementi's music fascinates with its contrapuntal and harmonic inventiveness (the *Morning Chronicle*'s 'scientific contrivance'), and rich, colourful orchestration. At times – I'm thinking especially of the variations-in-search-of-a-theme in No 3, where the national anthem emerges by stealth – Clementi can drench his innocuous material in grandiloquent rhetoric. But vivid contrasts of texture and colour usually save the day.

Best of the symphonies, I think, is No 4, beginning with nebulous chromatic slow introduction and then developing the fleet, featherweight themes of the *Allegro* with contrapuntal virtuosity. The *Andante cantabile* puts a Romantic gloss on a gracious, Haydnesque theme, while the third movement, somewhere between a minuet and a scherzo, is a darkly furtive piece in D minor, full of disquieting rhythmic dislocations. At least it should come third; it's placed second here, contradicting both the published score and the booklet track-listing. (Sony is aware of this error and has corrected it for future pressings.)

Sony's booklet-note, too, is inadequate, long on general background and speculation, woefully short on specific information about the music. These gripes aside, I enjoyed unreservedly the performances by the Salzburgers under

their British music director. Clementi's symphonies were well enough served by Claudio Scimone's late-1970s recording with the Philharmonia (recently reissued on Apex). But this new recording scores consistently in polish, clarity of texture (crucial in Clementi's frequent fugal escapades) and sheer character. Bolton brings out both the *opera buffa* sparkle and the dramatic surprises of the *Allegros*, gives a lively kick to the rhythms in the minuet-scherzos (I loved, too, the woodwind's gentle flexibility in the lilting Trio of No 2), and combines affectionate phrasing with a sense of forward motion in the *Andantes*. The superlative Salzburg wind section relish all the opportunities that come their way. In sum, a new benchmark for these works, warmly recommended to anyone who fancies investigating the Beethoven-Schubert symphonic hinterland. **Richard Wigmore**

Symphonies – selected comparison:
Philh Orch, Scimone (2/79R) (APEX) 2564 62762-2

Czerny

'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 71'
Piano Concertos – Op 28; Op 214. Rondo brillant, Op 233
Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra / Howard Shelley *pf*
Hyperion Ⓕ CDA68138 (73' • DDD)



Patience can be a virtue. When I reviewed Rosemary Tuck's version of Czerny's A minor Piano Concerto, Op 214, last June my conclusion was 'save your money and wait'. And here it is, the 71st volume in Hyperion's Romantic Piano Concerto series and every bit as fine as I'd hoped. Howard Shelley and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra are, by now, firm friends, and it's thanks to his intimacy with every note of the orchestral score, as well as that of the piano part, that makes these readings so rewarding.

Two of the works are recording premieres, and the F major Piano Concerto, Op 28, gets the best possible airing. But there's a mystery here as it has recently come to light that this music is identical to the Third Guitar Concerto of Mauro Giuliani. Which came first? Who knows, though if Czerny transcribed the guitar concerto it would explain why his later A minor Concerto was published as 'No 1'. Whoever wrote it, there are deft touches of orchestration in the opening *tutti* – be they a timpani line or a solo oboe phrase – and these are duly enjoyed; when the piano finally arrives it bounces in with great effervescence. The sheer energy and fecundity of ideas are irresistible. The slow movement of the F major, whose theme begins disconcertingly like the opening of Mozart's A major Piano Sonata, K331, is aptly poised, while there's a palpable sense of fun in the finale, a romp with just enough moments of introspection not to appear vapid.

The A minor Concerto (which certainly is by Czerny), somewhat stolid in Tuck's hands, is much more compelling here. This is in part because Shelley takes the finale at a significantly faster pace, dispatching its filigree with élan, even if the top end of the piano is a touch dry-sounding. But he's also simply more imaginative, beautifully shaping Czerny's moments of Chopinesque fantasy (for example 12 minutes into the first movement).

The *Rondo brillant* is another first on record and if you don't exactly come away humming the tunes, Shelley & co do at least keep you absorbed over its 15-minute length – even through the overblown build-up to the final bars. A fascinating booklet by Jeremy Nicholas completes a fine addition to this series. **Harriet Smith**

Piano Concerto, Op 214 – selected comparison:
Tuck, ECO, Bonynge (6/16) (NAXO) 8 573417

Dvořák

Symphony No 9, 'From the New World', Op 95 B178. Slavonic Dances, Op 46 B78 – No 3; No 5
Houston Symphony Orchestra / Andrés Orozco-Estrada
Pentatone Ⓕ PTC5186 574 (54' • DDD/DSD)

Dvořák

Symphony No 9, 'From the New World', Op 95 B178. A Hero's Song, Op 111 B199
NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra / Krzysztof Urbański
Alpha Ⓕ ALPHA269 (62' • DDD)





'One that loved not wisely but too well.' Othello's self-assessment could apply to Andrés Orozco-Estrada's account of Dvořák's Ninth Symphony with the Houston Symphony, or at least to the first two movements. Tempos are so broad that the opening sounds flabby, the flute solo (track 1, 4'06") stodgy. The famous *Largo* has a lovely cor anglais solo by Adam Dinitz, spun out at length, but the string theme which follows (2'56") nearly comes to a sleepy standstill. Orozco-Estrada occasionally stirs from his slumber: the first movement eventually builds up a head of steam in the coda and the woodwind birdcalls of the *Largo* are chirpy. His Scherzo is much more purposeful, although the central *Poco sostenuto* section rambles. The Houston brass impresses in the finale, especially the trombones, scything through the orchestral texture, but the general impression is one of tender loving care over drama.

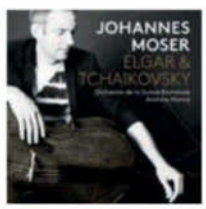
That impression is reinforced when you turn to Krzysztof Urbański's recording with the newly renamed NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra, which is packed with incident. There is great ferocity to the timpani and brass volleys in an urgent first movement (Urbański, like Orozco-Estrada, includes the exposition repeat). Punchy brass add a keen sense of drama.

The Hamburg cor anglais (no orchestral listing in the booklet, alas) shades dynamics beautifully in the *Largo* and the *ppp* strings that follow are delicately veiled. There is no lingering in the flute-led second subject but a fine sense of flow. The *Molto vivace* Scherzo rollicks along, furiant-style, but there is still a lilt to the dance. Urbański propels the *Allegro con fuoco* finale passionately, enabling the listener to revel in Dvořák's miraculous weaving together of themes from earlier movements. (Although the orchestra has a new name to reflect its shiny new Hamburg venue, where its press photo is shot, don't be fooled – the symphony was recorded last June in the Laeiszhalle.)

Urbański offers a generous coupling in a robust account of *A Hero's Song*, Dvořák's energetic symphonic poem from 1897 that is without programme. Orozco-Estrada's disc feels short measure with just two *Slavonic Dances* from the Op 46 set. If you're in the market for a new Ninth, Urbański and the Hamburgers are the ones to go for. **Mark Pullinger**

Elgar · Tchaikovsky

Elgar Cello Concerto, Op 85 **Tchaikovsky** Variations on a Rococo Theme, Op 33. Andante cantabile. Nocturne. Pezzo capriccioso, Op 62
Johannes Moser *vc*
Suisse Romande Orchestra / Andrew Manze
Pentatone Ⓕ PTC5186 570 (65' • DDD/DSD)



A most unusual account of the Elgar Concerto, one that's both musically

gripping and recorded at relatively close quarters. The first minutes command immediate attention, Johannes Moser's handling of the opening chords confident and tonally full-bodied, the ascending solo scales that lead to the principal melody haltingly tiered, the melody itself tenderness personified, slowing subtly before the strings take the lead and Moser rises boldly to the crest of the phrase. The full orchestra's response is both heroic and uplifting. The second subject finds Moser and the desks of the Suisse Romande playing into each other's hands, with flexibility to spare (more so than on the majority of Moser's rivals), the main body of the *Allegro molto* second movement, taken very briskly, pure quicksilver, again with keen inter-instrumental dialogue much in evidence. The *Adagio* positively aches, Moser achieving his affect by varying vibrato from an intense, pulsing glow to a cooler, tremor-free line. The finale is extremely dramatic, whether in the heavily weighted fugato-style music from 4'39" (great brass here) or the melancholic episodes at the heart of the movement (starting from around 6'21"), where Moser, although playing from the heart, never sentimentalises the music, and Manze is obviously of a like mind. The rapt return of the *Adagio* (9'12") and the defiant restatement of the concerto's opening chords that follow will likely take your breath away.

Prior to making this recording Moser applied himself to significant source material and in the case of Tchaikovsky's *Rococo* Variations he opts, like Steven Isserlis, to play the original version rather than the Fitzenhagen edition, which, in addition to making changes to individual variations, alters their order. Again, Moser offers a performance that combines sensitivity, agility and brilliance, while Manze and the Suisse Romande Orchestra are consistently on the ball. The shorter Tchaikovsky fill-ups maintain the interpretative high standards already established, the *Pezzo capriccioso*, Tchaikovsky's second original composition for the instrument, especially memorable. Altogether a wonderful CD, then, both major works granted recordings that are among the finest we've hard in recent years, the Elgar certainly as recommendable as either Sol Gabetta or Isserlis.

Rob Cowan

Elgar

Symphony No 1, Op 55.
Introduction and Allegro, Op 47[a]
[a]**Doric Quartet; BBC Symphony Orchestra / Edward Gardner**
Chandos Ⓕ CHSA5181 (65' • DDD/DSD)



With each new disc that arrives it becomes clearer and clearer that Edward Gardner is evolving into something really special. If I was permitted only one 'library' choice for the works under scrutiny these would not be they; but they can and should be applauded for their lucidity and clarity and insightful honesty. There is a major talent at work here – of that there can be no doubt.

Elgar's brilliant take on the Baroque concerto grosso – his *Introduction and Allegro* – is, of course, a lovely thing, the interplay between string quartet (the excellent Doric Quartet) and string orchestra assuming an almost mystic quality as the intimate and intensely personal are repeatedly writ large, larger, largest. Gardner's great strength is the vitality and rhythmic snap he elicits from the larger string body of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. But there is inwardness and confidentiality too and it's only the all-embracing warmth of a Barbirolli that I ultimately miss, not least in the cathartic final appearance of 'the Welsh theme' where a shade more indulgence, a more emphatic tug of emotion, is surely in order.

Moving to the First Symphony, Gardner clearly appreciates that we are dealing here with a study in conflict and change, evolution and transformation, musical and actual. Elgar's British Empire was at the threshold of a new century and the piece he was writing was at once a premonition and a proclamation. His metaphor – the great 'motto theme' in all its *nobilmente* distinction – shall endure but the turbulent first movement will see it buffeted and swept along on winds of change with barely a moment to take stock of what might soon be gone for ever. Gardner is properly, fiercely impulsive though never at the expense of rhythmic clarity and the shape of the bigger picture. Those tempest-tossed remnants of lyric ephemera are discreetly savoured. They carry their own distinctly Elgarian nostalgia.

The brash militarism of the Scherzo – circumstance without the pomp – is again vital, if without the teutonic heft that Barenboim and his Berliners scarily brought to it in their recent, and sensational, Decca account. But the winding-down of the transition into the slow movement – where our noblest aspirations are celebrated – is perfection from Gardner, and the *Adagio* itself is heartfelt, bringing some very lovely playing from the BBC SO, especially when hushed and secretive, and inclined towards those rapt falling phrases so beloved of Elgar.





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ALPHA 279

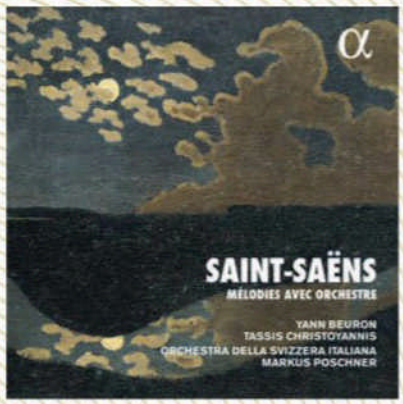
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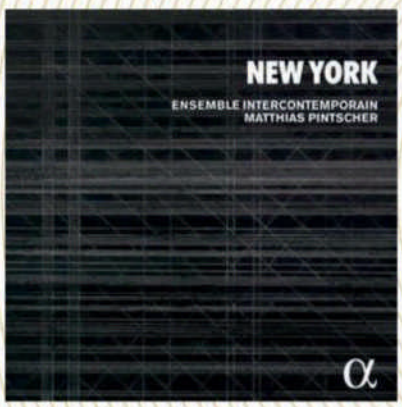
ALPHA 272



ALPHA 276



ALPHA 273



ALPHA 274



ALPHA 269



ALPHA 285

NEW RELEASES

ALPHA 269 Dvořák, Symphony No.9 'From the New World' & *A Hero's Song* | NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra, Krzysztof Urbański

ALPHA 272 *Thousand of Miles*, Songs by Kurt Weill & other émigré composers (Alma Mahler, Korngold, Zemlinsky)
Kate Lindsey MEZZO-SOPRANO & Baptiste Trotignon PIANO

ALPHA 273 Saint-Saëns, Mélodies avec orchestre
Yann Beuron TENOR & Tassis Christoyannis BARYTON | Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana, Markus Poschner

ALPHA 274 *New York*, Varèse, Cage, Carter, Feldman, Fulmer, Shepherd, Reich (WTC 9/11)...
Ensemble Intercontemporain, Matthias Pintscher

ALPHA 276 *Give me your hand*, Francesco Geminiani & the Celtic earth | Bruno Cocset, Les Basses Réunies

ALPHA 279 *Visions*, arias by Bizet, Franck, Saint-Saëns, Halévy, Bruneau, Godard...
Véronique Gens SOPRANO, Münchner Rundfunkorchester, Hervé Niquet

ALPHA 285 *Son of England* - Clarke, *Ode on the Death of Henry Purcell* & Purcell, *Funeral Sentences for the Death of Queen Mary II*
Le Poème Harmonique, Vincent Dumestre

ALPHA 674 Haydn 2032 - Haydn, Symphonies Nos 12, 70 & 60 *Il distratto* & Cimarosa, *Il maestro di cappella*
Il Giardino Armonico, Giovanni Antonini



'Sumptuous array of textures': the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Vasily Petrenko give an incisive account of Elgar's Second Symphony

In the finale, I do wonder if Gardner's handling of that ecstatically transformative passage (such a glorious surprise) at the heart of the movement is not, for all its tenderness, a little too restrained. He certainly makes us wait for the climax, violins keeping the emotionalism in check before the swelling of cellos and horns sweeps us off our feet.

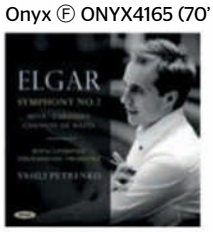
But there's no escaping the fact that Gardner arrives in the wake of Barenboim – a hard, if impossible act to follow, as revelatory an account of the symphony as I have heard in many a year.

Edward Seckerson

Symphony No 1 – selected comparison:
Staatskapelle Berlin, Barenboim
(5/16) (DECC) 478 9353DH

Elgar

Symphony No 2, Op 63. Carissima. Chanson de matin, Op 15 No 2. Mina
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko
Onyx Ⓕ ONYX4165 (70' • DDD)



Back in May 2015 I reviewed Petrenko's interpretation of Elgar's First Symphony and *Cockaigne*, remarking on the rhythmical dynamism of the recording and its bright recording quality. If anything, I am even more impressed by the Russian's reading of the Second Symphony, which has a clarity of sound to match the luxuriance of Elgar's orchestration. Indeed, the RLPO, on great form, provide a sumptuous array of textures with an ensemble that is crisp and incisive. It is so good to hear every note of the athletic brass counterpoint in the horns and trumpets and the lithe filigree of Elgar's careful doublings between wind and strings.

Petrenko is, for the most part, spot-on with his tempos. The recapitulation in the first movement is perhaps a tad fast but the sense of forward motion is always compelling. The funereal spirit of the second movement vividly captures that deeply intense, personal sense of melancholy Elgar undoubtedly felt at the death of Edward VII in 1910. Indeed, so intense is the impression of unconsolable sorrow that the music seems at times to surpass that of Mahler or Strauss. Yet this is counterbalanced magnificently by the *Schwung* of the noble, optimistic second-subject material, which Petrenko never allows to run away with itself. The mercurial Scherzo, arguably the most harmonically experimental of all the movements, also evinces a quicksilver translucency and a breathless energy which suits its numinous character.

Of all the movements, however, it is the finale where Petrenko is at his best. Some may find his tempo of the second subject a little on the slow side but I find its swagger and confidence infectious. Besides, it is well judged given that the development which follows feels far more controlled than other more rushed and disorderly interpretations I have heard over the years. Best of all, however, is the scintillating final climax and the valediction of the closing bars which, to use Elgar's description, most eloquently depicts 'the eternal issue of the soul's pilgrimage'. The three miniatures – *Carissima*, *Mina* and *Chanson de matin*, recorded back in September 2009 – are a delightful bonus.

Jeremy Dibble

Haydn

'Haydn 2032 – No 3, Solo e pensoso'
Symphonies – No 4; No 42; No 64, 'Tempora mutantur'. L'isola disabitata – Overture. 'Solo e pensoso', HobXIV*b*/20[a]
[a]**Francesca Aspromonte** *sop*
Il Giardino Armonico / Giovanni Antonini
Alpha Ⓕ ALPHA672; Ⓕ ② ◘ ALPHA673
(69' • DDD • T/t)

PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL MCNULTY/RLPO

Haydn · Cimarosa

'Haydn 2032 – No 4, Il distratto'
Cimarosa Il maestro di capella[a] **Haydn** Symphonies – No 12; No 60, 'Il distratto'; No 70
[a]**Riccardo Novaro** *bar*
Il Giardino Armonico / Giovanni Antonini
Alpha Ⓕ ALPHA674; Ⓕ ② ❶ ALPHA675
(80' • DDD • T/t)





Giovanni Antonini and Il Giardino Armonico once again come up trumps in their seemingly haphazard selection of symphonies from during and after Haydn's *Sturm und Drang* period. Only seemingly so: there's a clear link between the anarchy of Cimarosa's *buffo* scena *Il maestro di cappella* and the pantomime of *Il distratto*, a symphony assembled from the orchestral music for an Eszterháza comedy. This is the six-movement symphony that famously features the orchestra tuning up a few bars into the finale, not to mention itself becoming distracted, in the first movement, on an unresolving subdominant chord before suddenly realising why it had gone there in the first place. It would be easy to play this purely for laughs but Antonini and his players are suitably straight-faced, and the jokes come off all the better for it. Riccardo Novaro, too, is in fine voice as the stuck-up Kapellmeister who is sent up by his players.

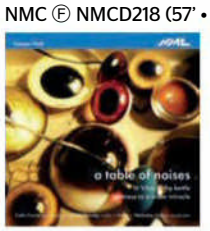
There's more in this vein. Symphony No 70 is another 'entertainment' symphony – at least until its finale, where *Sturm und Drang* breaks through once again in a fierce contrapuntal cock-fight in which a five-note knocking motif finds itself doing duty as tune, accompaniment and fugal tag. Thomas Fey's Heidelberg recording played around with the timing and tempo of the tag, distorting the whole architecture of this remarkable movement. Antonini once again plays it straight and shows that the subversiveness is all in the music – you only have to trust it. Fey, it seems, doesn't, and it falls flat; Antonini does and you find yourself hitting repeat to catch it all over again.

The earlier volume plays with ideas of isolation – Haydn himself was cut off from the outside world, he maintained, 'and so I had to become original'. Thus the aria *Solo e pensoso* finds itself amplified through proximity with a pair of masterpieces – the inexplicably underrated *Tempora mutantur* and Symphony No 42, in which Haydn first manages to synthesise the terseness of *Sturm und Drang* with an expansiveness of form and expression – and one of the finest of the earliest symphonies, No 4, with its foreboding central *Nachtmusik* movement. There's the overture to *L'isola disabitata* as well: as much a nascent tone poem as the prelude to an evening at the theatre.

As in the previous volumes, the orchestral performance is breathtaking in its accuracy – the sort of Haydn-playing you dream of. They've set themselves another 15 years to complete this cycle (fingers crossed), and if we're all still around for the composer's 2032 tercentenary, this may well become the period-instrument Haydn cycle by which all others are measured.
David Threasher

Holt

a table of noises[a]. St Vitus in the kettle. witness to a snow miracle[b]
[b]**Chloë Hanslip** *vn* [a]**Colin Currie** *perc*
Hallé Orchestra / Nicholas Collon
NMC Ⓕ NMCD218 (57' • DDD)



These three scores by Simon Holt, composed between 2005 and 2008, are all evocations of the fantastical and the visionary. *witness to a snow miracle*, a violin concerto originally written for Viviane Hagner but performed here by Chloë Hanslip, concerns itself with Christian martyrdom and has a title derived from a prose-poem by the sage Austrian writer WG Sebald. *St Vitus in the kettle* depicts 16th-century German peasants dancing in front of a statue to St Vitus, who had been boiled alive in a kettle in medieval times. *a table of noises* is a percussion concerto, performed by its dedicatee Colin Currie, and is a further reflection on ghosts and the afterlife inspired this time by Holt's Uncle Ashworth, who practised the dark arts of taxidermy.

The briefer *St Vitus* is sandwiched between the two concertos, and the performances are difficult to fault. The choreography of the percussion concerto finds Currie sat on a cajón (a big hollow boom-box drum) with other percussion instruments arranged in front of him on a table, pieces of metal and wood primed to scissor through sound like his uncle would once have sawed through flesh. From its agitated Bartókian introductory cadenza, the violin concerto pampers the soloist, balletic melodic flourishes shining against Mexican-wave woodwind and the neon afterglow of metal percussion and harp.

And yet nothing about this music feels satisfying or memorable. Holt is messing with some weighty, shamanistic concepts here – the occult, ancient rituals, glimpses of the afterlife – but there is no corresponding friction or ambiguity in the harmony; no capacity for his chromatically evened-out harmonies to trigger surprises, which leaves the violin concerto reshuffling a set of lifeless patterns. The percussion concerto is underwritten and cautious. Cascades of brightly orchestrated descending woodwind register as a mere colouristic effect, whereas in Ligeti's music – the source of such gestures – oddly stacked non-standard scales give the notes an actual function. A passage devoted to Uncle Ash's dog desperately wants to be witty but lacks the harmonic tools to deliver any punchline; a later section grooves, but the plainness of the harmony and cloying square rhythms funk only like Julie Andrews twerking. **Philip Clark**

Liszt

A Faust Symphony, S108
Steve Davislim *ten* **Chorus Sine Nomine; Vienna Academy Orchestra / Martin Haselböck**
Alpha Ⓕ ALPHA475 (68' • DDD • T/t)

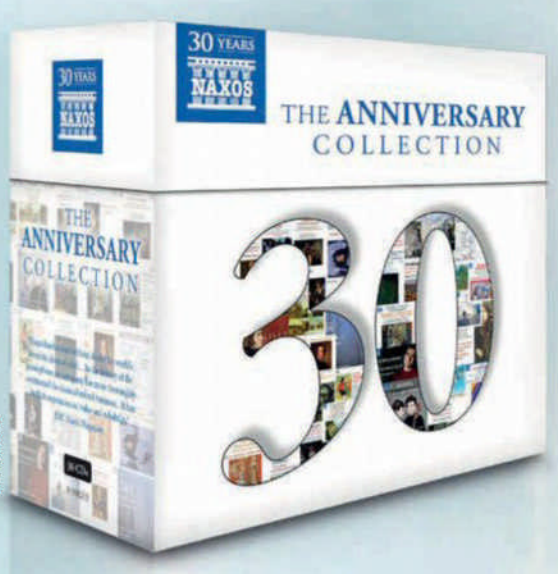


Writing of Martin Haselböck's Liszt recordings in a previous *Gramophone* context I remarked how 'the period-instrument Vienna Academy Orchestra… takes us away from the mountainous spectre of Wagner (unlike Masur, Haitink, Karajan or Solti) and presents [the composer's] original canvases in a fresh light'. In dealing with the work that could count as Liszt's orchestral masterpiece, I might add among the mountain dwellers Beecham, Bernstein (twice), Fischer and Sinopoli. Haselböck's approach is rather less visceral than theirs; again, as I've pointed out in the past, he reveals aspects of Liszt's scoring that would otherwise go unnoticed.

The muted strings at the beginning of 'Faust', played largely without vibrato, lead seamlessly to the winds; and once we reach the *Allegro impetuoso*, note the clarity of the stopped horns – a real sting in the tail. The brass and timpani (played with hard sticks) really tell, partially because the strings, although admirably energetic, lack the sort of pooled sonority that modern string bands command. A passage that works especially well arrives at 5'53", marked *meno mosso*, *misterioso e molto tranquillo*,

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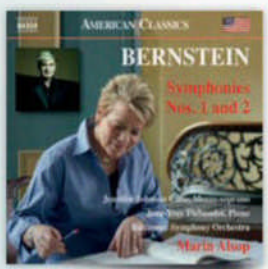
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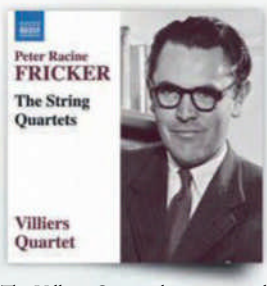
8.573666

"Giltburg has all the agility, power and expressive intensity Shostakovich's piano concertos demand… And he has found like-minded partners in the RLPO and Petrenko"
Gramophone



8.559790

"The performances are predictably excellent… Yves Thibaudet negotiates the two opening chains of variations with wide-ranging characterisation"
BBC Music Magazine



8.571374

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The playing is superb throughout."
The Observer



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where held wind chords and quiet, filigree string figurations hold the mood.

'Gretchen' is appropriately chaste, her chosen tempo relatively swift, and at her most telling when she tenderly tames the troubled beast by revisiting the material previously encountered in Faust's anguished *Allegro agitato ed appasionato* – that's at around 11'06". One of the score's incomparably magical moments occurs, previous to that point, at 8'17", where the strings take on a Brangäne role while the flutes metaphorically caress each other. Here I have to admit a preference for Leonard Bernstein's DG Boston Symphony recording (the same passage arrives at 11'01" on his disc), where there's so much more tenderness on offer. Haselböck's light touch has its appeal, Gretchen as painted in pastels perhaps, but with Bernstein she truly comes to life.

Again, at the start of 'Mephistopheles' Bernstein conjures a malevolent chuckle whereas Haselböck keeps the Devil at bay. Interestingly, Bernstein and Haselböck clock up similar total timings for this most mischievous of Liszt finales; but whereas Bernstein is ready for the closing 'Chorus mysticus' by 16'32", with Haselböck you have to wait until 18'14" which of course means that as well as driving harder and faster in the main body of the movement, Bernstein's closing chorus has extra breadth. Then again, to start where I began, with Haselböck, you begin to understand Liszt's sound world as he understood it, more or less, though whose interpretation he would have favoured is anyone's guess. Certainly this well-recorded production is well worth a try but don't whatever you do part with your tried and tested favourites until you've heard it. Beautiful singing by Steve Davislim, by the way. **Rob Cowan**

Selected comparison:

Riegel, Boston SO, Bernstein (4/78R) (DG) 447 449-2GOR

Mahler

Symphony No 9

Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra / Mariss Jansons

BR-Klassik Ⓕ 900151 (81' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie im Gasteig, Munich, October 20 & 21, 2016



With a Mahler tradition stretching back to the days of Rafael Kubelík, it was probably inevitable that this great orchestra would want to document its oft-heard interpretation of Mahler's Ninth under its current chief. Mariss Jansons was unwell last time such a recording was scheduled, in December 2011, when Bernard Haitink stepped in to direct the stoical (and in the finale surprisingly brisk) account immortalised on the same label. This one, captured live last year in Munich's sometimes problematic Philharmonie im Gasteig, risks being seen as superfluous for all that its textures are warmer and gentler, closer to Dvořák than to Alban Berg. In fact I can't think of a Ninth with less neurasthenic edge and a more inviting legato character. The playing, of predictable finesse, idiomatic or not, is preserved in grateful, slightly tubby sound. The concluding applause has been removed.

Jansons first set down the Ninth with the Oslo Philharmonic (Simax, 7/03) and his overall pacing remains broadly unaltered. That said, his approach now seems yet more remote from the edgy, hyperactive engagement favoured by Leonard Bernstein (DG, 5/92) or, closer to our own time, by Iván Fischer (Channel Classics, 6/15). Jansons has always been an essentially objective interpreter of Mahler and whether you find him sufficiently involved will be a matter of taste. That John Barbirolli (EMI, 9/64) was well aware of the problem from the other side of the fence is confirmed by the Bertrand Russell quotation found among his papers after his death: 'Nothing great is achieved without passion, but underneath the passion there should always be that large impersonal survey which sets limits to actions that our passions inspire.' For me, that passion is rather too strictly delimited in Jansons's first movement, its internal contrasts and direction of travel insufficiently dramatised. Berg heard this sometimes tortured music as expressing 'a tremendous love for this earth, and the longing to live on it peacefully' – an ultimately paradisiacal view that Jansons clearly endorses. Things turn less bland thereafter and, while the temperate finale doesn't stare into oblivion and probably won't move you to tears, its restrained expressivity and cultured sound provide easeful balm for difficult times. **David Gutman**

Selected comparison:

Bavarian RSO, Haitink (10/12) (BRKL) 900113

Mendelssohn

Violin Concerto, Op 64[a]. Octet, Op 20[b]

Liza Ferschtman, [b]Itamar Zorman, [b]Elina Vähälä, [b]Corina Belcea *vns* **[b]Krzysztof Chorzelski, [b]Marc Desmons** *vas* **[b]Sebastian Klinger, [b]Antoine Lederlin** *vcs* **[a]Het Gelders Orkest / Kees Bakels**

Challenge Classics Ⓕ CC72748

(58' • DDD/DSD)

[b]Recorded live at Van der Madelzaal, De Prisenkelder, Delft, Netherlands, July 28, 2016



Born in Hilversum of Russian-Jewish heritage, Liza Ferschtman is not a predictable player. Insisting that she would not record the Mendelssohn Concerto until she had discovered her own expressive take on the work, she turns in a rendition that manages to sound genuinely fresh. Her pure, silvery tone is not large but then neither is the accompanying band, more usually billed outside the Netherlands as the Arnhem Philharmonic, here sounding reduced in size notwithstanding a resonant acoustic. Both the outer movements culminate in remarkable bursts of speed yet the articulation of the soloist remains deft and elegant. Other parts of the opening *Allegro molto appassionato* are taken more deliberately than might be expected. Witness the tranquil second subject and the lead-in to it. The innovative cadenza, which Mendelssohn wrote out in full rather than allowing the soloist to improvise, has remarkable emotional and structural weight, and there are countless imaginative touches throughout.

Challenge Classics' bill of fare is unusual but not unique, and James Ehnes offers formidable competition with his straighter, cleaner, more conventionally integrated realisations on the Onyx label. In the Octet his colleagues are billed as members of the Seattle Chamber Music Society, whereas Ferschtman is joined by a multinational scratch group of luminaries. With three-quarters of the Belcea Quartet involved the results are if anything even more passionate than in the concerto. The performance was captured live in Delft with a finale so intense that it isn't always perfectly in tune. Should you be intolerant of intrusive sniffing this may not be the version for you, but I don't doubt that listeners averse to the salon ambience of less fevered readings will find it sensational. The microphones are set much closer here.

I should perhaps mention that applause is retained after the Octet and that the booklet-notes are not always well translated. That said, it is heart-warming to find Ferschtman's own revivifying thoughts borne out by the special qualities of her music-making. **David Gutman**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Ehnes (2/11) (ONYX) ONYX4060

Mozart · Rachmaninov

Mozart Piano Concerto No 23, K488[a].
Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No 3, Op 30[b]
Grigory Sokolov *pf*
[b]**BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Yan Pascal Tortelier;**
[a]**Mahler Chamber Orchestra / Trevor Pinnock**
DG Ⓕ (CD + DVD) 479 7015GH2 (72' • DDD)
Recorded live at the [b]Royal Albert Hall, London, July 27, 1995; [a]Mozarteum, Salzburg, January 30, 2005
DVD: 'Grigory Sokolov: A Conversation That Never Was' – a film by Nadia Zhdanova



Concerto repertoire appears for the first time in DG's series of live archival recordings with pianist Gregory Sokolov. In Mozart's A major Concerto, K488, one has to put up with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra's emaciated string tone (the anaemic-sounding first-movement second subject, for example), and the diffuse balance in loud *tuttis* resulting from the slightly distant, overly resonant engineering. Sokolov, however, plays wonderfully, achieving an arresting fusion of vitality and refinement. He participates in the first movement's opening ritornello and imbues the development section with dynamic inflections that illuminate Mozart's harmonic surprises. While the celebrated *Adagio* is arguably too slow for the woodwind soloists to shape their lines beyond 'make sure you've got enough breath support' (the uncredited bassoonist has particularly prodigious lung power!), it's hard to resist Sokolov's pinpoint articulation and hypnotic legato. The pianist comes even more into his own through the *Allegro assai*, with gorgeous yet stylistically apt tonal gradations and crisply shaded Alberti basses.

Sokolov fans among live broadcast collectors and what used to be called 'tape traders' have long considered the pianist's 1995 Proms performance of the Rachmaninov Third a holy grail, and for good reason. Once past the deceptively sedate opening theme, Sokolov nonchalantly flies, taking the vertiginous passagework in suave stride in the manner of the composer himself and the late Zoltán Kocsis, yet accounting for plenty of buried motifs and inner voices. At the same time, he adjusts to accompany when the orchestra's *concertante* passages need to dominate. What is more, Sokolov's ability to grasp big chords without an iota of either bluster or imbalance allows him to negotiate the composer's heavier, thicker and, to my mind, inferior alternative cadenza with no apparent effort. If you want to hear rich, intelligently sustained string tone, listen to the Intermezzo's grippingly sculpted opening, and also notice how the piano's dramatic entrance logically arises from the preceding music, rather than abruptly interrupting. The finale's broad rhetorical stretchings all make intrinsic musical sense and never give the impression of a pianist seeking to draw attention to himself. In the coda, incidentally, Sokolov initially forgoes the triplets in favour of Rachmaninov's difficult eighth-note *ossia* but reverts to the triplets when the tempo picks up.

Although Sokolov did not directly participate in the accompanying DVD documentary *A Conversation That Never Was*, one gets to know him via interviews with friends and colleagues, and archival footage that includes scenes from the 1966 Tchaikovsky Competition, which he won at 16. Poetry by the pianist's late wife Inna Sokolova figures in both the film and the booklet-notes, a lovely and appropriate gesture.

Jed Distler

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Mozart

Serenades – No 9, 'Posthorn', K320; No 13, 'Eine kleine Nachtmusik', K525. Two Marches, K335

Cologne Academy / Michael Alexander Willens

BIS Ⓕ (SACD) BIS2244 (75' • DDD/DSD)



The term 'serenade' evidently meant diffrerent things to Mozart at different times. The *Posthorn* is a Salzburg work, composed in 1779, and presumably intended as an example of the *Finalmusik* that accompanied the ebb and flow of university terms. *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, meanwhile, dates from 1787 and was composed in Vienna, where it served as a *notturno*. Two marches flank the *Posthorn*, with which they are probably associated as processional music, and *Eine kleine* is restored to its original five-movement form with the addition of a minuet from the much earlier String Quartet in G, K80.

None of this is demanding music: indeed, the *Posthorn* is full of Mozartian musical jokes, from the *Allegro* that bursts impatiently into the slow introduction to the almost wilful over-use of Salzburg clichés, as if the 23-year-old composer were sticking two fingers up at the archbishopric out in the sticks that he so longed to leave. Then there's the posthorn itself, its five-note range exploited with deadpan virtuosity by Hannes Rux.

Eine kleine is something completely different: a fine example of the art that conceals art, with a formidable construction and harmonic ingenuity that belie its status as high-class light music. The Cologne Academy's period instruments impart a welcome, grainier texture than some more sumptuously upholstered modern-instrument recordings. The interpolation of such an early minuet may seem anachronistic but Mozart apparently retained a fondness for the work for many years after its composition. (And anyway, you can always programme it out for the 'classic' four-movement work.) Undemanding, yes, but an hour and a quarter of pleasurable music in fine performances. **David Threasher**

Pettersson

Symphony No 14

Norrköping Symphony Orchestra / Christian Lindberg

BIS Ⓕ (SACD + DVD) BIS2230 (53' • DDD/DSD)

DVD: 'The Song of Life – Allan Pettersson in Conversation' (1987), with English subtitles



Allan Pettersson never heard his Fourteenth Symphony (1977-78). Premiered 17 months after his death in June 1980, it has fared relatively well, at least on disc, the present issue being its third recording. Sergiu Commissiona's came first, a Phono Suecia recording made the week after the first performance in December 1981. Although rather hard to find now, as a performance it stands up very well and set the benchmark. Johann Arnell's with the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra followed a dozen years later and, while not displacing Commissiona's, is still widely available in CPO's box-set.

Many commentators have noted that the Fourteenth, like No 15, is lighter and more varied in mood and texture than its predecessors. Do not be misled by this, or the quiet, almost translucently scored opening – No 14 delivers all the typical Petterssonian fingerprints and traits in a freewheeling contrapuntal structure running for over 52 minutes. It is shot through with lighter passages, and Christian Lindberg's more expansive view, taking almost five minutes longer than Commissiona and Arnell, underscores this. As with the Sixth Symphony and Second Violin Concerto, No 14 is based on one of the composer's *Barefoot Songs*, imparting a lyrical impulse brought out more fully by Lindberg than before.

The Norrköping Symphony Orchestra are once again on superb form. They really have the idiom under their fingers, directed by the man who is now unquestionably Pettersson's foremost champion. BIS's recording once again has great presence and depth, outpointing both rivals, so that this new account is now market leader. The bonus DVD of a sometimes combative Pettersson in conversation, with occasional contributions from his brothers (there are subtitles in English only), makes this self-recommending. **Guy Rickards**

Comparative versions:

Stockholm PO, Commissiona (PHON) PSCD12

Berlin RSO, Arnell (10/94) (CPO)

CPO999 191-2 or CPO777 247-2

Rachmaninov

Piano Concerto No 2, Op 18[a].

Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op 42

Vanessa Benelli Mosell *pf*

[a]London Philharmonic Orchestra / Kirill Karabits

Decca Ⓕ 481 4393 (53' • DDD)



The London-trained Italian pianist Vanessa Benelli Mosell has conspicuous musical (and even more conspicuous photogenic) talent, and for a young artist still relatively new to the market it's understandable that she should want to showcase it to the max. In a warhorse such as Rachmaninov's Second Concerto you could argue that this is especially forgivable. But when self-display becomes such an overwhelming priority as here the alarm bells do start to ring.

Mosell's opening gambit is ultra-spacious, in a way that a Richter can bring off and make special, but for which she does not yet have quite the command or, as it transpires, the large-scale vision. In the succeeding lyrical paragraph it becomes apparent that the piano is so closely recorded as to swamp the orchestra, and because Mosell is pedalling as richly as she would do in the concert hall, the aural effect is more than a little confused. And so it continues: the technical grasp is fine but the habitual surges and retreats and the generally hectoring tone give the impression of imitating a favourite performance rather than working out a fresh, individual one. No complaints whatsoever about the orchestra or conductor, though.

The *Corelli* Variations are also strangely recorded, in an acoustic where the texture all too quickly saturates and *fortissimos* become battering rather than dramatic or noble. The performance itself is thoroughly prepared, but again more strenuous than searching. I actually had the impression of listening to a demo tape (an impressive one, to be sure) rather than to something engineered by a major label, and I came away feeling slightly bludgeoned, but at the same time fairly sure that this is not a full reflection of what Mosell has to offer. **David Fanning**

Rachmaninov

Piano Concertos – No 2, Op 18; No 3, Op 30

Khatia Buniatishvili *pf*

Czech Philharmonic Orchestra / Paavo Järvi

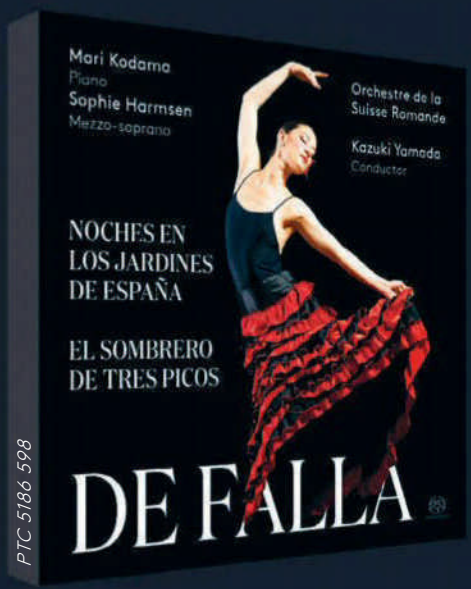
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(four months younger than that other tigress of the keyboard, Yuja Wang), you might well be wowed. But whether you'd discover the beating heart of this music, I'm less sure – for Buniatishvili is all about speed.

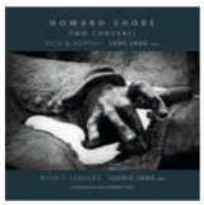
This can pay dividends, for I've never liked the slow movements to be taken too spaciously, finding those who follow the composer's own tendency for swiftness to my taste. In the Second Concerto's *Adagio sostenuto* Buniatishvili emerges from the brief orchestral introduction with complete naturalness and everything flows easily, which is as much a credit to Paavo Järvi as anyone, and there are some characterful contributions from the woodwind of the Czech Philharmonic. Yuja Wang, at a similarly flowing tempo, imbues the line with an unassuming limpidity which is very effective. Right from the concerto's opening moments, there's tremendous power to Buniatishvili's playing, and her massive technique overcomes every hurdle with ease. But in the finale I found her short on character – be it Yuja Wang's playfulness or Stephen Hough's majestic climaxes.

The Third throws up similar issues. It will come as no surprise to hear that Buniatishvili plays the showier original cadenza in the first movement and technically again she's hugely impressive, yet there's so much more to this music than is revealed here. The slow movement's introduction is lovingly moulded by Järvi and, when Buniatishvili enters, freedom and reactivity are to the fore; but, for instance, as the tempo increases (just after the five-minute mark), there's strength in abundance but a shortage of warmth; how beautifully Volodos plays this, though I find his tempo for this movement overall too slow. She produces some breathtakingly fine filigree, however (6'53" onwards). The finale sets off at a headlong pace and it's very much to Järvi's credit that the orchestra aren't fazed in the slightest. But others find more contrast between the treble-only writing and the surging theme at the *Più mosso* marking (1'19") – just listen to Sokolov here (see page 41), even if the recording is a bit primitive. Overall, one primarily for Buniatishvili's fans. **Harriet Smith**

Piano Concertos Nos 2 & 3 – selected comparisons:
Hough, Dallas SO, Litton (A/04) (HYPE) CDA67501/2
Rachmaninov, Philadelphia Orch, Stokowski, Ormandy (RCA) 09026 61265-2
Piano Concerto No 2 – selected comparison:
Wang, Mahler CO, Abbado (6/11) (DG) 477 9308GH
Piano Concerto No 3 – selected comparisons:
Volodos, BPO, Levine (A/00) (SONY) SK64384
Sokolov, BBC PO, Tortelier (5/17) (DG) 479 7015GH2

Shore

'Two Concerti'
Mythic Gardens[a]. Ruin & Memory[b]
[a]**Sophie Shao** *vc* [b]**Lang Lang** *pf*
[a]**21st Century Chamber Orchestra / Ludwig Wicki;**
[b]**The China Philharmonic Orchestra / Long Yu**
Sony Classical Ⓕ 88985 34873-2 (54' • DDD)
Recorded live at the [b]Beijing Music Festival, October 11, 2010; [a]KKL Luzern, Switzerland, April 20, 2014



He may be best known as having written scores for the *Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* trilogies, and those for almost all of David Cronenberg's films, but Howard Shore (*b*1946) also has a sizeable output of works for the stage (notably his opera *The Fly*) and concert hall. Two of his recent concertos feature on this disc – both confirming that, whether in terms of formal concision or expressive understatement, Shore is a composer for whom less is more.

Ruin & Memory (2010) was written for Lang Lang, who takes on this first performance with his customary fluidity and flair. These qualities are central to a piece whose starting point was the life and musical ethos of Chopin, as reflected in its late-Classical orchestration and an emotional restraint that, in the central *Largo*, suggests pathos more Mozartian than Chopinesque. A pity that the finale (hardly taken *Prestissimo* as marked) ends with so juddering a final chord, but it does act as catalyst for the thunderous applause which ensues.

With its inspiration in three classic Italian gardens, *Mythic Gardens* (2014) was written for Sophie Shao – her warm and alluring cello tone well suited to music in which soloist and orchestra are even more closely integrated. The first two movements might have benefited from greater expressive contrast but the final *Presto* banishes any lingering wistfulness with its purposeful sense of resolution.

Sound is that of a spacious and well-defined acoustic, and it is no surprise that the booklet-notes on either work are less extensive than those on the musicians. A pity about the short duration, too, as there are numerous shorter pieces by Shore that would have been apposite as a filler. **Richard Whitehouse**

R Strauss

Don Juan, Op 20. Ein Heldenleben, Op 40[a]
[a]**Fuminori Maro Shinozaki** *vn*
NHK Symphony Orchestra / Paavo Järvi
RCA Red Seal Ⓕ 88985 39176-2 (61' • DDD)
Recorded live at Suntory Hall, Tokyo, February 18 & 19, 2015

R Strauss

Don Juan, Op 20. Ein Heldenleben, Op 40[a]
[a]**Lorenz Nasturica-Herschcowici** *vn*
Munich Philharmonic Orchestra / Valery Gergiev
Münchner Philharmoniker Ⓕ MPHL0003
(65' • DDD)





These two discs present two prolific but very different conductors with orchestras they each took over at the start of the 2015-16 season. Paavo Järvi's represents the first instalment of a Strauss series with his Japanese band, with two further discs planned; Gergiev's is the third release (following Mahler and Bruckner) on the Munich Philharmonic's new label.

The first differences to note are primarily technical. RCA's sound from Suntory Hall is outstanding, and a great deal firmer and clearer than the disappointingly washy, spongy engineering we get from Munich, in which close miking picks up plenty of Gergiev's accompanying swish-swoosh vocalisations, as well as the bowing of Lorenz Nasturica-Hershcowici's violin solos in *Ein Heldenleben*.

Gergiev's conducting is similarly short on detail: several passages he ploughs through with his head, one imagines, buried in the score as his players hang on; elsewhere, such as in the slow final pages of *Heldenleben* or the first love scene of *Don Juan*, he borders on the indulgent. On large-scale terms the performances are not unsuccessful, I suppose, and there's certainly plenty of what one might charitably call edge-of-the-seat excitement. Particularly in *Heldenleben*, though, one starts to feel that his musicians have been left to get on with it – which, it should be admitted, they do with admirable skill.

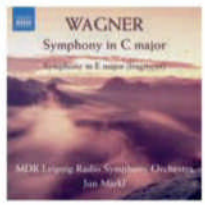
In the larger work, too, there are some big moments where Gergiev just doesn't take his time to make the most of the score's rhetorical effects: paradoxically, his performances are considerably slower than Järvi's but tend to feel rushed. Further quick comparison with Järvi and his well-drilled players takes you to a completely different level in terms of execution, less perhaps in terms of basic notes than of the care with which they are placed in context.

Järvi's *Don Juan* is thrillingly precise and pinpoint, and characterised by a real momentum and *Schwung*. The main virtues of his *Heldenleben* are clarity, control and impeccable orchestral discipline, all the more impressive given the fact that these are live recordings (the recording dates for the Gergiev, incidentally, coincide with three concerts featuring both works but the performances are not described as live).

Järvi rattles through the opening statement with plenty of swagger and a real skip in his step, and his critics are brilliantly pointed (Gergiev's are a rather dishevelled lot by comparison). There's a real sense of the Hero being characterised, too: clearly reluctant to rouse himself for battle, sleepy in the Works of Peace. Fuminori Maro Shinozaki's Companion is nicely relaxed and considered, though it's a shame something couldn't be done about his tremulous final note. The last ounce of grandeur and weight is perhaps missing but this is still an account, along with its excellent coupling, that's well worth hearing. **Hugo Shirley**

Wagner

Symphonies – in C; in E (fragment, orch Mottl)
MDR Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra / Jun Märkl
Naxos Ⓜ 8 573413 (56' • DDD)



Wagner's would-be Beethovenian Symphony in C major is tolerably well known. Though a student work, the composer retained a soft spot for it, retrieving the parts in the 1870s and conducting it himself in 1882. Never the most reliable of witnesses, he held Mendelssohn responsible for its suppression. In the case of the Symphony in E major he had only himself to blame. No more than the first movement and a fragment of the second were completed in short score in 1834, rendered performable by Felix Mottl after the composer's death.

Non-specialists unfamiliar with this torso may find the present issue a more economical introduction than its rivals which include the more generous Chandos anthology cited below. Alongside the two symphonies, Neeme Järvi takes in the familiar *Rienzi* Overture plus two further rarities, the *Huldigungsmarsch* and *Kaisermarsch*. About those, however, *Gramophone*'s Arnold Whittall was scathing: 'You'd have to go a long way to find worse compositions by a truly great composer.'

The E major Symphony was clearly intended to be a softer-grained, more Schubertian piece than its predecessor, despite taking off from either the Scherzo of Beethoven's Ninth or his *Fidelio* Overture. While neither conductor allows the argument to hang fire, I warmed to the more visceral quality of Märkl's Leipzig Radio forces, partly attributable to Naxos's closely focused sound. Audiophiles may prefer Glasgow's wider-open space. Both conductors give us the classically prescribed first-movement exposition repeat.

Still, it's the C major that leaves the stronger impression, with Märkl finding real virility in the up-tempo movements where Wagner's motivic allusions to Beethoven can seem naive. Wind-playing in the marginally more Wagnerian *Andante* is not ideally refined.

Does it matter that there are so few hints of the mature master in this early Beethoven-meets-Weber idiom? Such 'unripe' invention can be fun and the disc is certainly worth sampling. A pity the back inlay muddles the chronology of the works. **David Gutman**

Selected comparison:
RSNO, N Järvi (6/12) (CHAN) CHSA5097



Whitley

Duo[a]. I am I say[b]. Five Piano Pieces[c]. Three Pieces[d]. Viola Concerto[e] **[b]Sarah-Jane Lewis** *sop* **[b]Ashley Riches** *bass* **[ad]Eloisa-Fleur Thom** *vn* **[a]Shiry Rashkovsky, [a]Asher Zaccardelli** *vas* **[c]Rolf Hind, [d]Kate Whitley** *pf* **[b]Choirs from Kender, Lyndhurst and John Donne Primary Schools; [be]The Multi-Story Orchestra / Christopher Stark**

NMC Debut Discs Ⓕ NMCD229 (56' • DDD • T)



If not an unknown quantity, Kate Whitley (*b*1989) is still little known on the wider UK music scene and this latest of NMC's invaluable Debut Discs deserves to bolster her reputation. Not least in the chamber domain, where she evinces real insight into instrumental character. The Three Pieces for violin and piano (2013) explore timbral and textural limits in terms of pithy motifs and concise forms amounting to a sonata *malgré-lui* not unlike that by Janáček; and if the Five Piano Pieces (2014) feels too self-contained to become a cohesive cycle, the Duo for violin and viola (2015) impresses in its supplely intertwining melodic lines with discreet multi-stopping and succeeds as a musical representation of the Brzeska sculpture that inspired it.

Of the two larger works, the Viola Concerto (2010) uses a recurring phrase to integrate its four succinct movements with their pointed contrasts in orchestration. This latter is precisely realised by the Multi-Story Orchestra, who also take on the less intricate yet resourceful scoring for *I am I say* (2016). Conceived for soprano and bass soloists, as well as a children's choir drawn here from three primary schools, these verses by Sabrina Mahfouz (with a final one by the choir) marry ecological awareness to a whimsy that recalls Lizette W Reese; reflected in music whose underlying repetition is offset by subtle variations in emphasis on course to a final section which makes explicit its message in the deftest of expressive terms.

Performances are finely attuned to the music at hand, with succinct notes on each piece and an introduction from Kerry Andrew. Make no mistake, Kate Whitley is a composer to watch. **Richard Whitehouse**

'Azul'

Aghae/Jacobsen Ascending Bird **Dvořák** Rusalka – Song to the Moon[a] **Golijov** Cello Concerto, 'Azul'[b] **S Stevens** Suite from Run Rabbit Run **Stockhausen** Tierkreis: Leo

[ab]Yo-Yo Ma *vc* **[b]Michael Ward-Bergeman** *hyper-accordion* **[b]Jamy Haddad, [b]Cyro Baptista** *perc* **The Knights / Eric Jacobsen**

Warner Classics Ⓕ 9029 58752-1 (59' • DDD)



The Knights, an ensemble of orchestral dimensions but flexible enough to perform repertoire drawing on a wide range of contemporary and international musical styles, began as a group of talented young musicians improvising together. Today it has evolved into one of the most intriguing and dynamic advocates for music of our time, particularly devoted to what is emerging as a new formal style: sonic landscapes that are generally lush, lyrical, eclectic in instrumentation and melodic forms, and given to the expansive and hypnotic vistas of minimalism without the strict dependence on repetition. This is high-end mood music, with its roots in the global everywhere.

Yo-Yo Ma has been an advocate of the group, and violinist Colin Jacobsen (who co-founded The Knights with his brother, conductor and cellist Eric Jacobsen) is a touring member of Ma's Silk Road Ensemble. Ma joins The Knights for an album that takes its name from Osvaldo Golijov's loosed-limbed cello concerto *Azul*. Premiered by Ma and the Boston Symphony in 2006, the piece was substantially revised and has evolved into a four-part meditation with the cello providing an intense and introspective cantilena. The orchestra is enlarged by a large percussion section, which is active throughout and provides not just colour but also much of the tension that prevents the music from lapsing into the ardent stasis to which it always tends.

Golijov is a composer of surprises, and each of these movements moves through unexpected moods and intriguing modulations. A searching melodic fragment that opens the first movement gives way to increasingly animated descending figures, then an extended chromatic burst from the percussion, ending with a sense of interruption and expectation that sets up the aural glow of the following section, the 'blue' haze of a contemporary take on the chaconne. The emotional trajectory and much of the heft of the piece is fulfilled in the final movement, 'Yrushalem', which recalls the first movement and was inspired, at least in part, by thoughts about the violence that has gripped Israel in recent decades.

The disc includes two delightful sorbet interludes, Dvořák's Song to the Moon from *Rusalka*, arranged by Jesse Diener-Bennett, and a buoyant interlude, *Tierkreis: Leo*, a fragment derived from Stockhausen's *Musik im Bauch*, a 1975 'scenic piece' which includes short musical sketches of the zodiac, of which this is one. The deft arranger is the young American composer Caroline Shaw.

Ma is definitely the star of this show, though not in every piece. His cello line is placed forward and prominently in the sound mix, and the solo part often floats up and hovers for long periods in the earnest and pleading place of his instrument's upper range. That tone can stand for the larger ambition of the recording: to break through a perceived sense of distance from the audience, grab them firmly by the ears and hold them long enough to convey a sense of deeply felt emotion. **Philip Kennicott**

'Bologna 1666'

Alberti Concerti per chiesa e per camera, Op 1 – No 7; No 9 **Anonymous** Violin Concerto 'in honorem Divi Petronii' **Colonna** La caduta di Gerusalemme sotto l'imperio di Sedecia ultimo re d'Israelle – Sinfonia. Messa a 5 – Sinfonia avanti la Messa **Laurenti** Violin Concerto, Lau6 **Perti** Gesù al sepolcro – Sinfonia. La lingua profetica del taumaturgo di Paola – Sinfonia avanti l'Oratorio (attrib Torelli). San Galgano Guidotti – Sinfonia (attrib Torelli) **Torelli** Violin Concerto, A.2.3.10 **Zavateri** Concerti da chiesa, e da camera, Op 1 – No 12, 'A tempesta di mare' **Basel Chamber Orchestra / Julia Schröder** *vn*

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi Ⓕ 88985 31559-2 (67' • DDD)



Why 'Bologna 1666'? Well, thankfully not because there was a fire there. But the date is a touch misleading, since it is not that of the music but of the founding of the city's Accademia Filarmonica, a sort of high-level guild of composers and performers whose demanding standards made it a benchmark of excellence – particularly on matters theoretical – right up to Mozart's time. All the composers here were members of it while also working at the Basilica di S Petronio, so although they range chronologically from Colonna (born in 1637) to an anonymous composer working in the 1750s, there is every justification for considering them a distinct 'Bologna Instrumental School' to set alongside the more familiar Corellian 'Roman' and Vivaldian 'Venetian'.



'A composer to watch': Kate Whitley with conductor Christopher Stark

It makes a pretty good subject for a CD. Torelli is the only reasonably well-known name, and while Zavateri's Op 1 concertos were recorded in full by the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra in 1996 (DHM, 8/96), he is no more likely to be familiar to most people than are Perti, Alberti or Laurenti. In truth, the sinfonias struggle to engage when divorced from their intended oratorios, but the concertos here are vital works with true characters of their own. For descriptive purposes one could say that they combine the confident energy of Vivaldi with the richer textures of Corelli, but it would probably be fairer to appreciate these composers in their own right. Vivaldian influence is evident in the concertos of Alberti, but like the others he provides his solo violinist with a more shapely kind of virtuosity. And Zavateri's *A tempesta di mare* is a super piece.

The Basel Chamber Orchestra, on period instruments, do them proud with their coursing full sound and evident joy in the music, capped by director Julia Schröder's easily virtuoso and tonally ample solo violin. Here is proof that there are still plenty of invigorating Baroque concertos out there to be rediscovered and enjoyed.

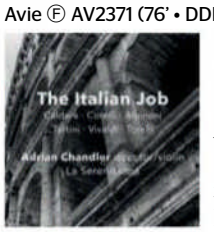
Lindsay Kemp

'The Italian Job'

Albinoni Concerto, Op 9 No 3[b] **Caldara** Sinfonia in C **Corelli** Santa Beatrice d'Este – Sinfonia **Tartini** Violin Concerto, D51 **Torelli** Sinfonia, G33 **Vivaldi** Bassoon Concerto, RV467[a]. Concerto 'alla rustica', RV151[b]

[b]**Gail Hennessy,** [b]**Rachel Chaplin** *obs* [a]**Peter Whelan** *bn* **La Serenissima / Adrian Chandler** *vn*

Avie Ⓕ AV2371 (76' • DDD)



My heart skipped a beat when this new offering from La Serenissima and Adrian Chandler landed on my desk, such was my enjoyment of their *Gramophone* Awards-shortlisted Vivaldi *Four Seasons* recording (10/15). So to discover that with this all-Italian assortment of sinfonias and concertos they've actually topped their 2016 triumph – and apparently effortlessly – gives me no small amount of pleasure.

La Serenissima have a glorious and all-too-rare ability to make one's pulse race afresh with every new project, and 'The Italian Job' has all their typical hallmarks: a fresh, zinging tone alive with vitality and enjoyment, an effortless easy panache from both ensemble and soloists, and the whole underpinned by a scholarly attitude to programming and performance style which is yet worn with light grace.

They also throw the recording critic a problem, because when faced with such a consistently excellent, colouristically and stylistically contrasting programme whose differences absolutely sing together as a unit, then to draw readers' attentions to 'highlights' feels thoroughly unhelpful. However, I will say that Chandler's violin solos in the Tartini Concerto for violin, strings and continuo are ones of a singing sweetness and ease that leave you wishing it wouldn't end. Also, that never has an Albinoni oboe concerto held me in such rapt delight as this double concerto did with soloists Gail Hennessy and Rachel Chaplin. Finally, that while with recordings I'm usually focused only on the finished package in my hands, with Torelli's Sinfonia in C I couldn't help but dream of what an extraordinary listening experience it must have been at the recording session, at St John's Smith Square – both in the lavishly ringing *tuttis* (this sinfonia has a monster-sized solo line-up of four trumpets, timpani and two each of oboes, bassoons, violins and cellos) and in the sudden drops down to unexpectedly intimate string forces.

In short, were I asked to condense this review down to two simple words, they would be: buy it. **Charlotte Gardner**

Tchaikovsky's Rococo Variations

Johannes Moser talks to Hugo Shirley about why he prefers Tchaikovsky's original version

My discussion of the score of Tchaikovsky's *Rococo* Variations starts, of necessity, with a question: which score? Will it be the cellist Wilhelm Fitzenhagen's 'revision', or the original version (completed 1876), based on Tchaikovsky's manuscript but first published only in the 1950s? For his new recording of the piece on Pentatone, the German-Canadian cellist Johannes Moser has opted – as most musicians increasingly do – for the latter. But he's gone a step further: 'Because the orchestral material from Kalmus is so faulty,' he tells me, 'I made my own orchestral material, with lots of corrections.'

Moser's own relationship with the piece in some ways also reflects its recent reception history. 'I first came across the original version at the Tchaikovsky Competition in 2002,' he explains. 'For one odd year, they wanted to have the original, and I didn't even know it existed!' He played both versions for several years, before deciding to perform the original one exclusively. 'I like it more,' he admits, before adding that he was also worried that, without committing to one or the other, he may have ended up switching between versions by mistake during a performance.

We settle down with the scores in a dressing room in west Berlin's remarkable early-1930s Haus des Rundfunks – Moser takes particular delight in taking me downstairs in the building's original paternoster lift – and he begins by talking through the differences between the versions. Fitzenhagen arguably went well beyond his brief when Tchaikovsky sent him his new work. Rather than just offer practical, cello-focused feedback, Fitzenhagen produced his own version. He cut the final variation, moved the third and seventh (both marked *Andante*) so that they came sixth and third respectively, and repurposed the *Allegro vivo* fourth variation as a new virtuoso finale, segueing straight into the coda.

'Fitzenhagen puts in repeats here,' Moser explains further as we look at the insouciant theme. 'The original is much more concise, and what makes sense about the theme only going through once is that it's then mirrored in the variations.' Moser rifles through a few more pages. 'It's then the same until we come to the end of the second variation, where we go into the cadenza, which in the Fitzenhagen comes pretty much after Variation 5.'

Again, Moser explains why he prefers the original. 'What I like about the cadenza starting earlier and going into the D minor Variation 3 is that we enter drama much earlier.' He has similar reasons for preferring the original position of the *Allegro vivo* Variation 4. 'Here we have a very virtuosic thing in the middle, as well as again at the end. In the revised version, the dramatic curve is just like this…and then at the end: ZACK!' The steady line he's been tracing with his hand suddenly jerks up. 'Here there is more variety, and I think it's very smart to do something virtuosic in the middle: in a way, it just wakes everybody up!'

He turns to Variation 8, which fell victim to the most drastic stroke of Fitzenhagen's red pen, and points to the cello's first lines. 'But it's such a charming beginning here – it's like a *galop*! Fitzenhagen maybe thought it would all be more concise if he cut something off.



Moser's aim is to find the Mozart in Tchaikovsky, thereby increasing its flexibility



The historical view

Pyotr Jurgenson (publisher)
Letter to Tchaikovsky, February 1878

'Loathsome Fitzenhagen! He is more importunate in wishing to alter your cello piece...and he says you have given him full authority to do this. Good heavens! Tchaikovsky *revu et corrigé par* Fitzenhagen!'

Igor Glebov (alias Boris Asafyev)
Tchaikovsky's Instrumental Music (1922)

'[It is] one of [his] remarkable, bright and most climactic works...Here is heard the fascination of the composer's spirit happily encountering the world...virtuosity bows to simplicity, sincerity and poetry of sound.'

David Brown
Tchaikovsky: The Man and his Music (2007)

'[It] may make for easy listening – but remain truly attentive [and] Tchaikovsky's inventiveness and mastery of musical space begin to become apparent. None but a truly great composer could have written this (seemingly) unpretentious piece.'

I suppose it's not the most meaningful music, but I find it entertaining.'

The conversation dwells briefly on how Fitzenhagen pushed the changes through, and why Tchaikovsky seems to have acquiesced (one of his pupils reports him being angry, but concluding, 'The Devil take it! Let it stand as it is!'). 'What is interesting', explains Moser, 'is that Fitzenhagen told Jurgensen the publisher that all of the changes were approved by the composer. They weren't – though some were. And that's pretty ballsy, I'd say!' And Tchaikovsky? 'He could have said, "I totally forbid that!" But he was a good businessman – here, finally, was a concerto that was going to be played.' He refers to the Violin Concerto and the First Piano Concerto, and the enormous difficulties that Tchaikovsky faced in getting them performed. But mention of those works also brings us on to the specific character of the *Rococo* Variations.

Moser revels in the work's Mozartian grace and sees much of it looking forward also to the tone of *The Nutcracker*. 'When I look at Variation 2' – he sings a snippet – 'I think, "Papageno! Papagena! Papageno!…" from *Die Zauberflöte* in its playfulness. And when we come to the slow Variation 7 in the original, I think of Tamino's "Dies Bildnis" aria.' This, he explains, is less about specifics and more about a common sense of quiet disorientation. 'Tamino's looking at the picture and his world is upside down; and here you have something in three but it's in two, and you don't know where you are.'

'Apart from the Haydn concertos, this is probably the only piece where there's never an issue with balance, and that's rare'

He turns back to Variation 5: 'This is one that I take quite free, taking my lead from the *grazioso* indication. These two upbeats you have with the orchestra – I love this idea of musical tennis, of looking for as much communication as possible. And look how Tchaikovsky just moves the upbeat to the beat! Here I try to make a really strong point of playing from the downbeat, so that it's clear what the joke is – it's tiny, but it's playful.'

All this is part of an approach that Moser has honed over time. When he first played the piece, his teacher David Geringas encouraged a heavier 'Russian-esque' style. 'Over the years, though, I've become more interested in seeing where the Mozart is in Tchaikovsky, to lighten it up, to make it a little bit more flexible.' This, he admits, hardly makes things any easier technically speaking, especially given the cello's excursions into its very highest registers. He points to the very end of Variation 3, where the cello rises in harmonics to an A nearly three octaves above middle C: 'You're completely on your own, and there is nothing there; the orchestra just meets you on the very highest note, so you'd better get that one!' He turns to the close of the *Andante sostenuto* Variation 7: 'This is another spot. It's all harmonics up here, *ppp*, and if you've had too much coffee in the afternoon…!' He laughs.

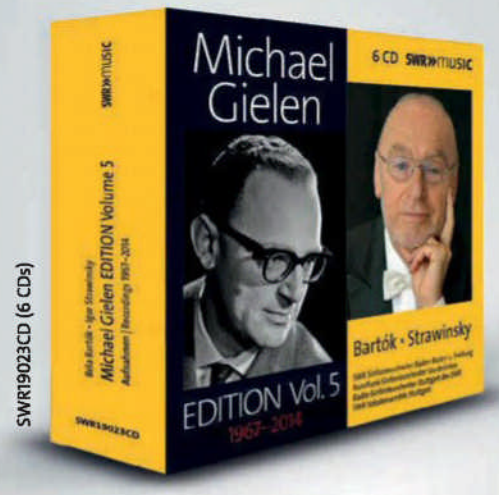
The lightness of Tchaikovsky's orchestration has one major advantage, though. 'This is probably the only piece, except for the Haydn concertos, where there is never an issue with balance, and that is really rare for a cello. Ninety per cent of rehearsals is usually spent on balance – with Dvořák and Schumann, for sure. Here it's so nice: finally you can talk about music!' G

▶ Read our review of Moser's recording of the 'Rococo' Variations on page 34

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Chamber



Charlotte Gardner succumbs to the charms of La Rêveuse's Buxtehude:
'Listening to this album feels rather like being delightfully, playfully –and thoroughly willingly – seduced' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 53



Richard Wigmore welcomes the Tetzlaff Quartet's latest disc:
'Part of the thrill of Schubert's final quartet is the sense of four players striving against near-impossible odds' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 55

JS Bach

Six Sonatas for Violin and Harpsichord, BWV1014-1019
Chiara Zanisi *vn* **Giulia Nuti** *hpd*
Arcana Ⓜ ② A426 (95' • DDD)



Even before hitting the stereo, this first solo recording from violinist Chiara Zanisi was looking rich with promise, because while her name may be relatively unfamiliar, she's a longstanding regular within top early music ensembles such as Ton Koopman's Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra. The presence of harpsichordist Giulia Nuti was an equal draw, as her own first solo recording, 'Les Sauvages: Harpsichords in Pre-Revolutionary Paris', won the Diapason d'Or in 2014.

This is indeed very beautiful, too. Their starting point has been the belief that Bach's music has both an aura of magic and an almost divine form, and the translation of that into performance has yielded warmly fluid readings, and a clear-toned sound from Zanisi (on a 1761 Gagliano) that carries a beguiling twin quality of strength and etherealness. Her technique and shaping are equally lovely; elegant ornamentations, perfectly judged ebb and swell to sustained notes, and faster passagework sounding so at ease that its true complexity often washes over you.

One little quibble is that sometimes Nuti and her harpsichord slightly lose out to the violin in the overall balance, for instance in No 2's *Allegro assai*, where you really have to listen in if you're to appreciate the very real dialogue going on. However, this isn't a universal issue across the recording, as is demonstrated by the opening movement of No 5. Here, Nuti's gently sombre reading really is given the space to shine, and not simply because of the violin's husky mute and Zanisi's sensitive duetting.

One final aspect worth commenting upon is the acoustic itself, which is a warm, relatively soft-focus one. And all this adds up, for those readers actively in the market for a recent recording of these sonatas, to a contrasting and equally valid alternative to consider alongside Leila Schayegh's more brightly textured offering from last year, which was so well received in these pages.
Charlotte Gardner
Selected comparison:
Schayegh, Halubek (3/16) (GLOS) GCD923507

Bartók · Dohnányi · Kodály

'Hungarian Treasures'
Bartók Piano Quartet, Op 20 **Dohnányi** Piano Quartet **Kodály** Intermezzo
Notos Quartet
RCA Red Seal Ⓕ 88985 41188-2 (63' • DDD)



If this is indeed the first commercial recording of a substantial but lost chamber work by Bartók, one's instinctive reaction is at first excitement, and then suspicion. Bartók's hardly neglected, after all. Whatever the exact provenance of this Piano Quartet in C minor (and don't look to RCA's booklet-notes for any meaningful help on that score), if it hasn't been recorded until now, you can't help wondering why.

The answer might perhaps be that it's juvenilia, composed in 1898 by a school-age composer who'd clearly been listening to more Brahms than was entirely healthy. And that's what you get: a vigorous, robustly constructed four-movement work covered with Brahms's fingerprints and even a couple of near-quotes.

Only in a few places will you find foretastes of Bartók's mature musical imagination: the violin's stratospheric entries in the *Adagio*, that same movement's curious two-part structure and a fiery, episodic finale, which, for all their fervour and commitment, the Notos Quartet can't quite make hang together. Apparently they played from the composer's manuscript; and despite a recorded balance that's sometimes a little fuzzy in the middle, there's a real immediacy about their playing. Whatever its merits, it's hard to imagine this piece being championed with more conviction.

Still, if you listened to this disc sight-unseen, you'd probably guess that Dohnányi's lyrical, bittersweet F sharp minor Piano Quartet – also written by a teenager – was the real harbinger of genius here. It's more inventive, more shapely, with an unmistakable tang of paprika. The Notos Quartet play it with poetry and verve, and the piece itself is sufficiently rare for this recording to count as something of an achievement. An enjoyably dancelike account of Kodály's Intermezzo for string trio serves (in the group's word) as a 'sorbet' – and completes a well-played and enterprising debut disc from this excellent young German ensemble. **Richard Bratby**

Bartók · Janáček · Schulhoff

'Lettres intimes'
Bartók String Quartet No 1, Op 7 Sz40
Janáček String Quartet No 2, 'Intimate Letters'
Schulhoff Five Pieces
Voce Quartet
Alpha Ⓕ ALPHA268 (70' • DDD)



Amatory love is the subtext of the first and last works on this imaginatively planned European programme, the 'intimate letters' of the disc's title applying literally to Janáček's ragingly emotive Second Quartet and by inference to Bartók's calmer-centred First, which incorporates a theme associated with Stefi Geyer, a noted violinist whose charms had captivated the composer to the point of obsession. Midway between these two remarkable works comes a sequence of entertaining quartet miniatures by the gifted Czech composer Erwin Schulhoff, who died of tuberculosis in a Bavarian concentration camp in 1942. As I suggested when reviewing a recent rival recording by the Alma Quartet (Gutman, 3/16), Schulhoff's Five Pieces, which



'Masterly readings': James Ehnes and Andrew Armstrong are compelling in Beethoven violin sonatas

PHOTOGRAPHY: BENJAMIN EALOVEGA

date from 1923, reflect the local musical manners of Vienna, Italy, the Czech Republic and Argentina – the warmly seductive *Alla Tango milonga* fourth movement being especially appealing.

The first thing to say about the Quatuor Voce's playing is that it does indeed accentuate the music's intimate side: Bartók's *Lento* first movement is, at its opening, so hushed you dare not breathe, although, as the music rises in temperature (which it does soon enough), the players up the intensity level significantly. The *Allegretto* second movement has an engaging mobility about it, with salient themes thoughtfully brought into prominence within the context of the whole: no idea is allowed to hog the limelight unduly. Certainly the recording, which is superb in all respects and presents an extremely realistic sound frame, helps focus the effect. Maybe the Alma Quartet sound marginally more *gemütlich* in the Viennese-flavoured first piece from Schulhoff's set of five, and their take in the *Alla Serenata* ups the tempo in comparison with Quatuor Voce, but both performances work well.

Janáček's Second Quartet comes off best of all, with the composer's eerie use of *sul ponticello* (even within the first minute) proving especially effective. Still, once Janáček sets off *con moto* and asks for a more natural mode of playing, Quatuor Voce are fastidious over observing markings such as *fortissimo*, *mezzo-forte*, *espressivo* and so on. The wonderful *Moderato* third movement, a cradling lament, is played with affecting simplicity and the finale's furiously scrubbing onslaughts (at, say, 5'08") are high in shock value. Given the unusual programming context, comparisons are somewhat irrelevant; but, as a well-performed overview of that was happening quartet-wise during a specific 20-year stretch of the first half of the last century, you could hardly do better. **Rob Cowan**

Beethoven

Violin Sonatas – No 6, Op 30 No 1; No 9, 'Kreutzer', Op 47

James Ehnes *vn* **Andrew Armstrong** *pf*

Onyx Ⓕ ONYX4170 (62' • DDD)



This is James Ehnes's first disc of Beethoven sonatas and I very much hope it will herald a complete survey. He is joined by his regular partner-in-crime, Andrew Armstrong, and their long familiarity pays real dividends. The coupling of the *Kreutzer* with Op 30 No 1 is also musically astute, as the latter's original *Presto* finale ended up as the concluding movement of the *Kreutzer*.

They programme the *Kreutzer* first and its opening movement has that essential Bachian purity, which gives way to a *Presto* full of strength and energy, yet finesse and suppleness too. Silences are used to compelling effect, and the pizzicatos at 6'31" (track 1) are sufficiently present without knocking you to the back of the room. The closing moments too are judged to a nicety, taking the dynamic and tempo right down before the final explosion.

They are a tad slower in the *Andante* theme than Dumay and Pires or Faust and Melnikov but as soon as the variations begin their reading takes off. Ibragimova and Tiberghien, caught live, are also relatively spacious but so highly coloured that they're compelling indeed. Ehnes and Armstrong are stunningly responsive in the finale, with a sense of propulsion, yet without overlooking its moments of delicacy.

Op 30 No 1 may share a key with the *Kreutzer* but otherwise they are worlds apart. The opening, which has to sound

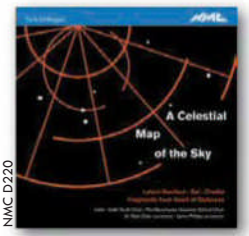
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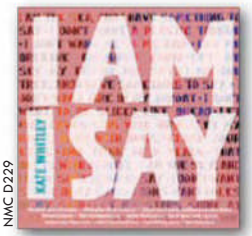
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KATE WHITLEY



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The Multi-Story Orchestra / Christopher Stark
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SIMON HOLT



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HOWARD SKEMPTON



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BCMG / Martyn Brabbins
Roderick Williams • Christopher Yates

BRIAN ELIAS



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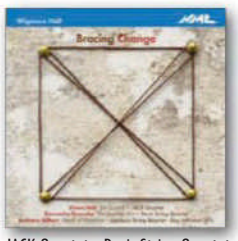
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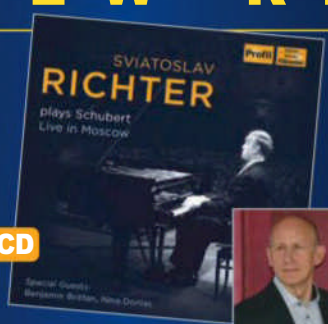
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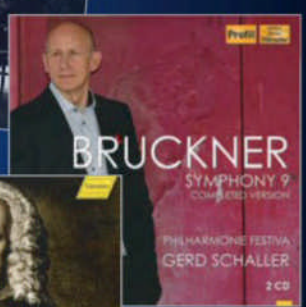


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almost nonchalant, can sound forced; not here, though, where everything unfolds with complete inevitability. Faust and Melnikov play up Beethoven's juxtapositions of dynamics and moods even more, but choice is down to taste, for both are masterly readings. Ehnes and Armstrong are ravishing in the slow movement, truly *molto espressivo*, while a sense of playfulness is irresistibly apparent in every bar of the finale, setting the seal on a compelling addition to Ehnes and Armstrong's remarkable discography.

Harriet Smith

Violin Sonatas – selected comparisons:
Dumay, Pires (12/02) (DG) 471 495-2GH3
Faust, Melnikov (10/10) (HARM) HMC90 2025/7
Ibragimova, Tiberghien (7/11) (WIGM) WHLIVE0045

Brahms · Schumann

Brahms Piano Quintet, Op 34[a]
Schumann String Quartet No 1, Op 41 No 1
[a]**Menahem Pressler** *pf* **Pacifica Quartet**
Cedille Ⓕ CDR90000 170 (72' • DDD)



Most pianists approach the Brahms Quintet with a degree of trepidation, for it's a big play and there's a lot that can go awry. Menahem Pressler must count as one of the most fearless of all musicians, for he was nearly 91 when he recorded this with the Pacifica Quartet. He puts me in mind of musicians such as Vlado Perlemuter and Mieczysław Horszowski, both of whom were still giving extraordinary concerts at a similar age. As you'd expect, this is not Brahms of driving energy, yet you are constantly aware that Pressler is a supreme chamber musician and the way he can illuminate even the most familiar passage is constantly fascinating. There's a genuine conversation going on between string players and pianist – how different from Pollini and the Italianos in that respect. The Pacifica are superbly responsive and the first movement unfolds with a sense of epic drama.

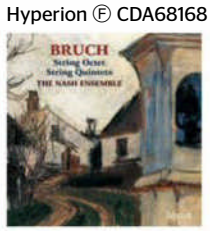
The *Andante* is pretty steady – I prefer the greater lilt of Hough with the Takács. It's the pianist who has the biggest challenge at a slow tempo and Pressler finds much incident and shading along the way, but it can be a little unstable. In the Scherzo pure speed is replaced by highly atmospheric playing, the C major theme given a ringing grandeur. After an intense slow introduction, the finale's *Allegro* has a sense of play as well as strength, though the closing *Presto* is a little tame. But this is still a remarkable achievement.

The Pacifica launch into Schumann's First Quartet with a sinuous beauty. Their slow movement is a highlight, given with enormous intensity – and some fabulous viola-playing from Masumi Per Rostad. The Zehetmair are a degree more flowing, yet at the same time create a more inward mood. The Scherzo is, in the new version, a tad cautious when compared to the drama of the Zehetmair and the Doric, and the same could be said of the Pacifica's finale, which is relatively steady and very correct in all its detail; the Zehetmair are extraordinary here, combining clarity, strength, passion and an unerring technical focus. **Harriet Smith**

Brahms – selected comparisons:
Pollini, Quartetto Italiano (6/87[R]) (DG) 474 839-2GOR
Hough, Takács Qt (1/08) (HYPE) CDA67551
Schumann – selected comparisons:
Zehetmair Qt (6/03) (ECM) 472 169-2
Doric Qt (12/11) (CHAN) CHAN10692

Bruch

Two String Quintets. String Octet
The Nash Ensemble
Hyperion Ⓕ CDA68168 (63' • DDD)



String players of a certain vintage might remember the excitement caused in 1991 by the publication of Max Bruch's A minor String Quintet. 'Rediscovered' works can often disappoint; but if what you want from Bruch is that same blend of Brahmsian poetry and gypsy verve that makes the First Violin Concerto so lovable, the A minor Quintet has it to spare. Add a deep vein of melancholy (Bruch wrote the Quintet at the age of 80, in the weeks following Germany's collapse in November 1918), and a sweet, sensuous nostalgia that anticipates Richard Strauss's late style, and what we have here is probably Bruch's finest string chamber work.

This is a superb account. The Nash Ensemble have a natural feeling for the music's ebb and flow, and while they're not afraid of big gestures and the bite of horsehair and rosin, they play beautifully as an ensemble, with the players responding to each other, and a real feeling of intimacy. Lawrence Power's viola sings through the texture, and Stephanie Gonley, on first violin, never lets the *alla ungarese* brilliance of the finale turn into a mini-concerto.

They're helped by Hyperion's engineers, who've made a church acoustic sound as immediate as a drawing room, even in the quasi-orchestral textures of Bruch's String Octet – which substitutes a double bass for the more usual second cello. The Nash Ensemble go at it with magnificent ardour and sweep, and bring an affecting tenderness to the slightest of Bruch's late chamber works, the Mendelssohn-like Quintet in E flat. Together, these performances go straight to the top of a not exactly crowded field; in fact, this disc needs to be heard by everyone who loves German Romantic chamber music.

Richard Bratby

Buxtehude · Becker

Anonymous Solo for Viola da gamba
Becker Sonata and Suite **Buxtehude** Sonatas – BuxWV261; BuxWV267; BuxWV272. Sonata and Suite, BuxWV273
La Rêveuse
Mirare Ⓕ MIR303 (69' • DDD)



During the late 1600s, when Dieterich Buxtehude was organist of the Marienkirche in Lübeck, the town council received a wonderful letter of application from one of the city's amateur musicians, offering his musical services. The instruments he could play in 'a fitting manner' were the violin, viola da gamba, violone, recorders, cornett, dulcian and 'all manner of wind instruments', plus the trombone and bass trombone. 'If necessary', he concluded, 'I can cope with keyboard and vocal music.'

No wonder then that the *stylus fantasticus* of the time reached its peak under Buxtehude's pen, because clearly even the amateur musicians in his city would have been well capable of getting their fingers around wherever his invention took him, and the intellectual energy and variety of the Lübeck environment is almost palpable in La Rêveuse's programme of violin and viola da gamba trio sonatas. For starters, in the ensemble's attitude to programming, because they haven't just stuck to Buxtehude's two published collections of sonatas but instead have raided the Uppsala University Library in Sweden for manuscripts of three sonatas he sent to an organist and court director friend in Stockholm. They've thrown in some context too, in the form of Becker's Hamburg-written Sonata in D for violin and viol, and an anonymous-but-likely-to-be-Lübeck-linked viol sonata from Oxford's Bodleian Library, which also only exists in manuscript form.

This scholarly contextual thinking and energy has also thoroughly pervaded the

actual performances. Overall there's a real sense of music happening right now; also of intellectual nimbleness. Then there's the continuo section's easy movement, and the nuanced, dancing lilt from Stephan Dudermel on the violin and Florence Bolton on the viola da gamba. In fact, listening to this album feels rather like being delightfully, playfully – and thoroughly willingly – seduced.

Charlotte Gardner

Chausson · Franck

Chausson Concert, Op 21[a] **Franck** Violin Sonata
Isabelle Faust *vn* **Alexander Melnikov** *pf*
[a]**Salagon Quartet**
Harmonia Mundi Ⓕ HMM902254 (67' • DDD)



Chausson's *Concert* for violin, piano and string quartet is chamber music, of course, yet displays a symphonic character that justifies the title. Some performances, such as the superb Decca recording by Pierre Amoyal, Pascal Rogé and the Ysaÿe Quartet, underscore the work's quasi-orchestral heft; others, like the classic Columbia account by Zino Francescatti, Robert Casadesus and the Guilet Quartet, present a more intimate view. In this dazzling new version, Isabelle Faust, Alexander Melnikov and the Salagon Quartet seem to be staking out a middle ground.

Faust and the quartet use vibrato rather sparingly, which clarifies the often intricate texture and creates a luminosity that, while lacking in bite and body, conjures and maintains a spellbinding, moonlit atmosphere. Note, for example, the pearlescent opacity of the passage at 6'26" in the first movement, and the almost spectral quality at the beginning of the finale – worlds away from the playful (yet equally magical) reading by Francescatti, Casadesus et al. Yet there's no lack of drama. Indeed, Faust, Melnikov and the Salagon frequently bring Chausson's fascination with Wagner to the fore and even anticipate the languorous sensuality of Scriabin (listen from 4'35" in the first movement), thanks in large part to Melnikov's judicious phrasing.

Franck's Violin Sonata is equally impressive. Here, again, Faust uses vibrato prudently, and in general finds intense expressivity in restraint and emotional directness. *Pianissimo* passages beckon in secretive, confessional whispers, and the sometimes blunt rhetoric of Franck's style is allowed to speak for itself without overemphasis or apology. The electricity of the third-movement Recitativo-Fantasia, for instance, is conveyed not with bold gestures but through quiet, sustained tension, so that even the most sparsely textured passage keeps one on the seat's edge. Melnikov's tone can harden in loud passages, but this may be partly the fault of the engineering, which is pleasingly resonant yet also strangely muffled. In any case, the interpretations are so committed and forthright that any occasional sonic blemish is only momentarily distracting. The Decca recording with Amoyal and Rogé offers the same coupling in better sound but seems overwrought in comparison. Those looking for greater passion and tonal warmth in this repertoire are urged to hear a recent Aparté release with Rachel Kolly d'Alba, Christian Chamorel and the Chicago-based Spektral Quartet. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Chausson – selected comparison:
Francescatti, Casadesus, Guilet Qt (MUSI) CD1260
Selected comparison – coupled as above:
Amoyal, Rogé, Ysaÿe Qt (2/96[R]) (ELOQ) ELQ476 8463
Kolly d'Alba, Chamorel, Spektral Qt (APAR) AP102

Clarke

'A Different Game'
Piano Trios – No 2; No 3; No 4, 'A Different Game'. Con coro[a]. Gleann Dá Loch[b]. In umbra[c]
The Fidelio Trio ([a]Darragh Morgan *vn* [ac]Adi Tal *vc* [b]Mary Dullea *pf*)
Métier Ⓕ MSV28561 (63' • DDD)



As Axel Klein's introductory note suggests, Irish new music is a significant yet relatively unknown facet of the European scene which is only now coming into its own. Among its most vital practitioners, Rhona Clarke (*b*1958) is a Dubliner whose output takes in most genres (excluding opera but including electro-acoustic); the piano trio prominent among her chamber works. Of those featured here, the Second Trio (2001) comprises an Intermezzo and Scherzo whose overall equanimity is offset by a motivic clarity no less apparent in the Third Trio (2002) – again in two movements and moving between suavity and vitality such that a latent anxiety comes to the fore without undermining the music's overall composure.

Most substantial of these pieces is the Fourth Trio (2016), the *Different Game* of its subtitle indicating the interplay between minimalist and jazz elements that motivates the disjunction of the initial *Moderato* and sardonic waltz stylings of its successor. There follows a brief though unruffled *Largo*, then a finale that brings the energetic elements heard earlier to a head as the work reaches its decisive close and so confirms this trio as a major addition to the medium.

This latter piece was written for the Fidelio Trio, whose expertise is second to none among present-day ensembles. The programme works well as a sequence too – the trios separated by the heady evocation of *Gleann Dá Loch* (1995) and the sombre choral underlay of *Con coro* (2011), then rounded off by the tranquillity of *In umbra* (2000). Immediate sound, a little too forward in more demonstrative passages, and a disc that does Clarke's profile no harm at all. **Richard Whitehouse**

Fauré · Franck · Szymanowski

Fauré Romance, Op 28 **Franck** Violin Sonata
Szymanowski Violin Sonata, Op 9. Romance, Op 23. Notturno e Tarantella, Op 28
Tasmin Little *vn* **Piers Lane** *pf*
Chandos Ⓕ CHAN10940 (77' • DDD)



It occurred to me while listening to this sensitively planned programme that the vintage violinist who Tasmin Little most reminds me of is Alfredo Campoli in his prime, by which I mean parallel degrees of warmth, tonal bloom, agility and a feeling of oneness with the instrument that spins the illusion that for the duration she *is* the violin. These are wholesome, red-blooded performances, direct and deeply satisfying, with no lack of imagination, the Szymanowski Sonata (1904) audibly reflective of both Brahms and Schumann, though the ethereal glitter that fills the composer's later output edges around much of the canvas.

Little's rapport with the superb Piers Lane strikes home right from the sonata's passionate opening. As a team they pull out whatever stops are necessary to make the music work, although no one could claim that this D minor essay is on the same artistic level as, say, the *Mythes* or the mysterious *Notturno e Tarantella* of 1917 that ends the programme. Here Little adjusts her approach to accommodate the other-worldly aspects of Szymanowski's more mature muse, switching to a slim, sinewy sound for the introduction then digging deep for the main body of the piece, navigating the textures with plenty of sensual tone.

Franck's Sonata was a wedding present from the composer to the violinist-



Gidon Kremer and Daniil Trifonov, along with cellist Giedrė Dirvanauskaitė, convey the ebb and flow of Rachmaninov – see review on page 56

composer Ysaÿe and once again Tasmin Little and Piers Lane chart love's course from the sophisticated romance of the opening *Allegretto ben moderato* to the near-operatic candour of the Recitativo-Fantasia with conviction, the finale opening with an appropriately breezy smile. The Franck is tailed with Fauré's barcarolle-like Romance of 1877, music infused with a deep sense of nostalgia, whereas the Szymanowski sonata is followed by a rather darker and more expressively outreaching Romance (1910), which he dedicated to his friend the violinist Paul Kochanski and which Little invests with considerable intensity.

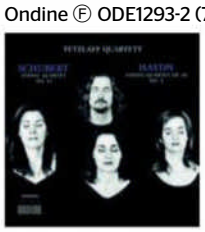
As to a final reckoning, I'd still recommend Alina Ibragimova with pianist Cédric Tiberghien as prime representatives of the numinous in Szymanowski's violin chamber repertoire but the disc under review achieves a fine balance of interpretative qualities and is much to be recommended. I note with interest that Tasmin Little is scheduled to record Szymanowski's two violin concertos and on the evidence of what we have here I'm confident that we shan't be disappointed, provided she's granted top-notch orchestral support. **Rob Cowan**

Szymanowski – selected comparison:
Ibragimova, Tiberghien (7/09) (HYPE) CDA67703

PHOTOGRAPHY: PHILIPPE HURLIN/DG

Haydn · Schubert

Haydn String Quartet, Op 20 No 3
Schubert String Quartet No 15, D887
Tetzlaff Quartet
Ondine Ⓕ ODE1293-2 (76' • DDD)



On the face it these two works, composed at either end of the string quartet's golden age, make unlikely bedfellows. Yet what they have in common, apart from an affinity of key, is their strangeness: visionary, daunting, even frightening in the case of Schubert's final quartet, antic and faintly disquieting in the outer movements of the Haydn. Violinist Gidon Kremer has dubbed Schubert's vast quartet 'virtually unplayable'. But 'virtually' is the operative word. As with Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge*, part of the thrill of a good performance is the sense of four players striving against near-impossible odds. For all their finesse and care for detail, the Tetzlaff Quartet are, at 11'36", a notch too deliberate in the tarantella finale, whose weird, lightning major-minor shifts seem to parody those in the first movement. I was over-conscious of two beats to each bar. Taking over a minute less, the Busch, Alban Berg, Belcea (all EMI) and Lindsays (ASV) all play with a quicksilver touch, coursing over the bar lines to create a phantasmagoric scene where *opera buffa* brio can curdle to nightmare.

In the first three movements, though, the Tetzlaff are profoundly satisfying. Most quartets (the Busch a magnificent exception) home in on the first movement's *molto moderato* and downplay the *Allegro*. Deploying a huge range of colours and dynamics, including a fragile, desiccated *pianissimo*, the Tetzlaff never lose sight of the basic pulse. Through all its unnerving shifts of perspective, the whole movement unfolds as a spiritualised dance, with a hint of jauntiness in the second theme's nagging conga rhythms. Among many felicitous details, how magically the Tetzlaff time and colour the unearthly opening of the recapitulation, then warm their tone without rising above *pianissimo* in response to the momentary lyrical softening.

The Tetzlaff are also spot-on in their pacing of the *Andante*, taking note of Schubert's *un poco moto* to create an etherealised counterpart to so many Schubertian 'walking' songs, not least in *Winterreise*. If the Busch and Belcea,

especially, distil more human poignancy here, the Tetzlaff bring out all the music's spectral eeriness and are properly terrifying in the Gothic-horror cataclysm of the second 'theme', where the music teeters on the edge of incoherence. After this the Scherzo, the nearest the work gets to normality, has a darting, gossamer lightness – a hint of danger in the fantasy, too, with each accent and dynamic change precisely gauged. The Trio, opening in a barely corporeal *pianissimo*, emerges as a rustic idyll half-heard through a gauze of dream.

Despite my relative disappointment at the slightly dogged finale, I shall certainly return to the Tetzlaff in Schubert's most disturbed, eccentric and enigmatic instrumental work. Some of those epithets fit the Haydn quartet, too, whose opening movement foreshadows Schubert's finale in its rapid, unsettling shifts of tone. The Tetzlaff bring to the whole work the same sensitivity and colouristic imagination they displayed in the Schubert. In the outer movements (the finale rightly taken at a robust *Allegro molto* rather than a helter-skelter *Presto*) they balance energetic directness with an acute awareness of the music's quirky, mysterious aspects. I liked the Tetzlaff's yearning inwardness in the Minuet, and the way they lean on the dissonant, climactic F naturals at the opening. The Trio and the following *Adagio* both have a floating delicacy I have rarely heard equalled, with that fastidious care for balance and creative variety of *piano* and *pianissimo* playing that are hallmarks of the whole disc.

Richard Wigmore

Prokofiev

Violin Sonatas – No 1, Op 80; No 2, Op 94.
Five Melodies, Op 35*bis*
Elisa Båtnes *vn* **Håvard Gimse** *pf*
LAWO Classics Ⓕ LWC1118 (65' • DDD)



The Prokofiev violin repertoire has been very fruitfully tapped in recent times, and this new release of the two sonatas and the *Five Melodies* presents something of a dilemma. Not only have we had the Japanese violinist Lisa Oshima in a visceral performance of the First Sonata, but also Alina Ibragimova and Steven Osborne performed both of the sonatas and the *Melodies* on a 2014 Hyperion disc, featured as Recording of the Month here in August that year. The distinguished Norwegian artists Elise Båtnes and Håvard Gimse offer a different perspective, but it is one that has firm stylistic grounding and a persuasive interpretative viewpoint of its own.

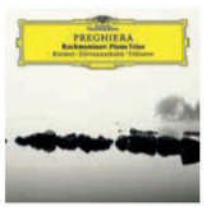
Båtnes and Gimse are recorded much more closely than Ibragimova and Osborne, but on top of that their playing has in general a sharper edge to the projection, which is by no means out of place in this music. One might, at first, question the measured tempo for the *Moderato* first movement of the Second Sonata, which adds well over a minute to the timing on the Ibragimova and Osborne disc. But on repeated listening it works, somehow bringing a touch of unease to the melody's sultriness. In fact in the entire programme, while Ibragimova and Osborne offer telling insights into the music's dynamic and emotional shading, the more forthright approach of Båtnes and Gimse has a valid point to make as well – not that they are in any way wanting when it comes to the allure of lyrical restraint, either in the sonatas or in the *Five Melodies*. Maybe this is not a decisive verdict, but I shall happily live with both versions.

Geoffrey Norris

Selected comparison:
Ibragimova, Osborne (8/14) (HYPE) CDA67514

Rachmaninov

'Preghiera'
Trios élégiaques[a] – No 1; No 2, Op 9.
Pregiera (arr Kreisler)
Gidon Kremer *vn* [a]**Giedrė Dirvanauskaitė** *vc*
Daniil Trifonov *pf*
DG Ⓕ 479 6979GH (67' • DDD)



It would be very easy for Daniil Trifonov, only just 26 and with the world at his feet, to spend his time in the solo spotlight, so it's good to hear him playing chamber music. And this is a fascinating disc, bringing together Trifonov with Gidon Kremer – 70 this year – and cellist Giedrė Dirvanauskaitė, one of the founding members of Kremerata Baltica. Kremer has never stopped exploring and in the promo DG video he talks about this being the right time to be immersed in Rachmaninov: 'Playing his music is like attending a Mass. You enter a spiritual space where every emotion is allowed but the main emotion remains love, which is familiar to everyone.'

The Second Trio sets off with a quiet solemnity, the two string players duetting ardently above the steady tread of the piano. There's much to thrill here, but still more striking are the moments of stillness and the way the movement unfolds seamlessly. The *Maestoso* section (4'40"), where the strings launch into driving triplets, is truly compelling but just listen to the way the tempo relaxes again, the high-lying cello melody (6'00") played with great poise by Dirvanauskaitė.

However, I do find Trifonov makes too much of a meal of the theme for the second-movement variations. The numbers are telling: he takes 2'40"; Berezovsky takes 2'27"; Kozhukhin at the 2011 Lugano Festival a mere 1'43" – the latter two still managing to be eloquent and expressive. But matters improve greatly once the variations begin and there are many moments of great felicity, gossamer figuration in plentiful supply. The finale has all the muscle the music needs – Trifonov's considerable technique comes into its own here – but more importantly there's an urgency of expression that feels entirely natural.

Though the First Trio is a student work, it is immediately recognisable as Rachmaninov and once again these players vividly convey the music's architecture and the ebb and flow of its emotions, from a mood of the quietest intimacy to wild extroversion. There's another rarity to open the disc: Kreisler's *Preghiera* for violin and piano, based on the slow movement of Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto, in which we hear to good effect the sheer range of colour in Kremer's playing, particularly potent in the lower registers.

Harriet Smith

Trio No 2 – selected comparison:
Makhtin, Kniazev, Berezovsky (4/05) (WARN) 2564 61937-2
R Capuçon, Levionnois, Kozhukhin (10/12) (EMI/WARN) 644701-2

'4 Cities'

Debussy Cello Sonata
Janáček Pohádka. Presto **Say** Four Cities
Shostakovich Cello Sonata, Op 40
Nicolas Altstaedt *vc* **Fazıl Say** *pf*
Warner Classics Ⓕ 9029 58672-4 (73' • DDD)



Anyone familiar with the alluring quasi-minimalist music of the Dutch composer

Simeon ten Holt could easily draw parallels between Holt's expansive *Canto ostinato* and the initial bars of Fazıl Say's immensely likeable *Four Cities*. This first 'city', 'Sivas', recalls a specific poet and a native instrument (a lute-like 'saz') but the warmly sensuous opening gives no clues as to various surprises in store along the way, with cellist Nicolas Altstaedt finally allowing his instrument to morph into something resembling warbling panpipes. The second-movement 'Hopa' throws us headlong into a ferocious dance – neither Bartók at his most unhinged nor the gypsy band Taraf de Haïdouks have anything on this – but the most original episodes are in the dramatic 10-minute tribute to 'Ankara' (Say's birthplace), where the ingenuity of the writing, prepared piano pitted against various colouristic effects on the cello, is so effective that there are times when you can't tell which instrument is playing. The wild-eyed finale ends with the musical equivalent of a pub brawl. I defy any musically responsive youngster who yawns at the prospect of listening to a work for cello and piano to leave *Four Cities* without wanting to hear it again. It is youthfulness personified and the performance is stunning.

In an interesting note for Shostakovich's Cello Sonata, the critic Julian Haylock observes how the composer 'appears to have embraced its neoclassical gesturing as a means of containing his deep feelings of anxiety concerning a trial separation from his wife, Nina, and his love for another woman'. Well, prepare yourselves, because Say and Altstaedt demolish the neoclassical façade and reveal that burning anxiety for all its worth, especially in the opening *Allegro non troppo*, a reading that turns on the heat like none other I've heard in recent years. The second movement drives hard; and if in the finale Altstaedt doesn't quite match Daniil Shafran for a sense of mischief, he's still compelling. Midway between Say and Shostakovich come a playfully pouting rendition of Debussy's late Sonata and Janáček's rustic *Pohádka*, another distinctive performance, 'distinctive' because these remarkable musicians take each work on its own terms. Happily, there's no all-pervasive Say/Altstaedt 'method'. As the musical canvas changes, they change with it, which is very much as it should be. A terrific CD.

Rob Cowan

'Nordsending'

Hellstenius Rift **Nørgård** Babette's Feast – Pastorale. Strings. Tjampuan **Saariaho** Cloud Trio **Sørensen** Gondole
Trio Aristos
BIS Ⓕ BIS2269 (79' • DDD)



Cellist Jakob Kullberg's immersion in the works of Per Nørgård has seen him enlist his trio colleagues for this assembly of scores for two and three strings. The line-up, heavy on Nørgård, throws a rather unforgiving spotlight on those composers who don't approach their craft so rigorously.

Problems first. Yes, texture can push music forward as much as rhythm, harmony, shape, tension, stasis (paradoxically), etc. But every time an instrument seizes the top line in Kaija Saariaho's *Cloud Trio* before diffusing into disintegrating shimmering or scraping, I am left bored and frustrated with the suspicion that the composer is too. And I smell a rat with the adoption of a wholly different voice for the trio's second movement. In Henrik Hellstenius's *Rift*, the cascades of downward scales are alluring but not fertile enough for the improvisation Hellstenius calls for. The piece winds up up chasing its tail, sounding a little like Saariaho.

Bent Sørensen's *Gondole* sounds exactly like Bent Sørensen and that's just fine; there is some exquisite playing from Trio Aristos in the elusive, smoke-like harmonies and half-hidden melody (one of Sørensen's favourites) of 'Gondola in Dreams', and Kullberg's falsetto singing is almost ghostly. Not a note is wasted; Sørensen's counterpoint is delicate but full of hard work.

Conversely, Per Nørgård's instruments don't so much react to one another as emerge from each another. *Strings* is brilliantly plotted using the 'old' rules of contrast, tension and pure beauty. *Tjampuan* is just as tight, the principle of 'emergence' made explicit with a hocket technique. At times Nørgård appears to hint at the concurrent but differing metres used in the last movement of *Strings*, and the resulting frisson resounds wonderfully in the hands of this distinctly blended and highly musical trio. A totally bizarre booklet-note reinforces the music's suggestion that the more rigorous the process, the more tangible its results.

Andrew Mellor

'Russian Masters'

Borodin Prince Igor – Polovtsian Dances
Glazunov Chant de ménéstrel, Op 71
Prokofiev Cello Sonata, Op 119
Shchedrin In the Style of Albéniz
Shostakovich Cello Sonata, Op 40
Tchaikovsky Nocturne, Op 19 No 4. Pezzo capriccioso, Op 62
Jamal Aliyev *vc* **Anna Fedorova** *pf*
Champs Hill Ⓕ CHRCD127 (80' • DDD)



Anyone planning an all-Russian cello recital has a wonderfully rich menu to choose from. And with over 80 minutes of music on this disc, Jamal Aliyev and Anna Fedorova have certainly laid on a generous spread, including the sonatas by Shostakovich and Prokofiev as well as shorter works by Glazunov, Tchaikovsky and Shchedrin, plus Aliyev's own virtuoso transcription of two (and not the pair you might expect) of Borodin's *Polovtsian Dances*.

Aliyev plays with a pleasant if tightly focused tone and Fedorova is clearly on the same wavelength. There are countless little touches of imaginative colour – the balletic grace with which Aliyev unfolds the second subject of Prokofiev's first movement, Fedorova strumming her piano like a gusli at the start of Glazunov's *Chant du ménéstrel*, and the two of them whirling and shimmering together in Shostakovich's Scherzo. Overall, though, their Shostakovich feels more controlled and less episodic than their Prokofiev. A bigger problem is the cool, resonant Champs Hill Music Room acoustic, in which Fedorova's piano sounds glassy above the stave and Aliyev's pizzicatos struggle to blossom.

In fact, a certain tonal coolness permeates this whole disc: no late-Romantic lushness here. That's not entirely a bad thing. The pair find unexpected depths of melancholy in Tchaikovsky's Nocturne and *Pezzo capriccioso*, and make the Shchedrin's bravura Piazzolla-meets-Falla stylings glint like black ice. I did wonder if a slightly different programme order might have made for more satisfactory repeated listening. With the two sonatas placed together at the start of the disc, the remaining pieces felt like a series of encores, when, given the relationships between these composers, there's surely a story to be told here. Thought-provoking rather than mouth-watering.

Richard Bratby

Eugene Ormandy

Philip Clark celebrates the Hungarian-born American conductor renowned for the string sound he coaxed from his orchestras and his wide-ranging repertoire

When he relocated to America in 1921, the Hungarian violinist Jenő Blau immediately changed his name. Given that Jenő was the Hungarian equivalent of Eugene, he didn't need to search far for his new first name, and while the source of 'Ormandy' is less certain – some have suggested it was a long-running family middle name – Eugene Ormandy was born some 22 years after his mother gave birth to Jenő Blau, whom his father had named after the great Hungarian violinist Jenő Hubay.

Every piece he touched was characterised by a ripened string tone around which the rest of the orchestra could glow

Ormandy's relationship with the violin remained the nerve centre of everything he would achieve as a musician. When asked, during a 1960 interview, about the distinctive sound of the Philadelphia Orchestra, which he led from 1936 until 1980, he claimed its opulent splendour was synonymous with his fulsome understanding of the violin. 'Any conductor reflects the instrument he played,' Ormandy stated; and, then, moreover, 'The Philadelphia Orchestra sound – it's me!' Unlike music directors of the New York Philharmonic with whom his tenure at Philadelphia overlapped – Dimitri Mitropoulos, Leonard Bernstein and Pierre Boulez – Ormandy was never an ideological maestro; there were no lectures about the relative worth of tonality against atonality, no hand-wringing questions speculating 'whither music'. From Bach to Mahler, Tchaikovsky to Nielsen, Mozart to Orff, Gershwin to Shostakovich and Delius to Penderecki, the range of Ormandy's repertoire, both in the concert hall and on record, covered the stylistic waterfront. No conductor today would likely be handed such a free rein in the recording studio, and every piece Ormandy touched was characterised by a ripened string tone around which the rest of the orchestra could glow.

For some, though, these relentlessly sumptuous strings presented problems. The argument goes that any conductor who aimed the well-heeled brightness appropriate to a Rachmaninov symphony towards Schoenberg, not to mention Haydn or Mozart, was likely doing someone, somewhere a disservice. Bernstein – quoted in Jonathan Cott's book *Dinner with Lenny* (Oxford University Press: 2012) – lampooned what he termed 'Gene Ormandy and His Velvet Strings'. Who, Bernstein asked, wants to hear velvety strings 'in Haydn or in the Bach B minor Mass or in the scherzo of a Mahler symphony?'

Soon after his arrival in the US, Ormandy found gainful employment as a rank-and-file member of the orchestra that accompanied silent films at New York's Capitol Theatre. After only a week in post he was appointed concertmaster and was subsequently given occasional conducting duties, then the progression he made towards depping for a sick Arturo Toscanini at the Philadelphia Orchestra only ten years later, in 1931, was swift and painless. Prior to filling in for the most charismatic conductor on the planet, Ormandy's experience was minimal. He had conducted an outdoor concert in Philadelphia and led a New York Philharmonic-Symphony summer concert at Lewisohn Stadium, but Toscanini's testing programme of Brahms, Weinberger and Strauss's *Till Eulenspiegel* happened to play directly to his strengths. Those formative years at the Capitol Theatre had hard-wired Strauss's tone-poem deep into Ormandy's soul. When the theatre's regular conductor was taken ill, Ormandy took the baton; in a *Gramophone* interview in April 1970 he told Alan Blyth: 'I had been to a conductor's class in Budapest but I'd never been on the podium. But I got through Tchaikovsky's Fourth, *Till Eulenspiegel* and *Coppélia*…without a score.' Soon enough, Ormandy was appointed Music Director of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra (the precursor of

DEFINING MOMENTS

•1921 – *American move*
The young Jenő Blau moves to New York, changes his name to Eugene Ormandy, and makes a living as a violinist in a theatre pit orchestra.

•1931 – *Breakthrough*
Deputises for a sick Arturo Toscanini with the Philadelphia Orchestra and is an instant hit. Leads to a permanent post with the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra.

•1936 – *The Philadelphia Story*
Begins job-sharing with Leopold Stokowski, and after two years takes over the reins of the Philadelphia Orchestra – and stays for four decades until 1980.

•1965 – *Pioneering Mahler*
Makes the first recording of Deryck Cooke's completion of Mahler's Tenth – a standout moment alongside other noteworthy premiere recordings of music by Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Hindemith and Penderecki (and *Peter and the Wolf* with David Bowie in 1977).

•1985 – *Final rites*
Ormandy enjoys a busy retirement with a hectic schedule of guest conducting. He dies in Philadelphia on March 12.



today's Minnesota Orchestra); and when he arrived at Philadelphia he initially shared duties with Leopold Stokowski, before taking over as the orchestra's full-time Music Director two years later.

Assuming he wasn't dealing in 'alternative facts', Ormandy's ability to tackle a score as structurally labyrinthine as *Till Eulenspiegel* unseen and without a score tells us much about the conductorly instincts he would apply to his new job in Philadelphia. Stokowski had left sizeable boots to fill, but Ormandy retained the fundamentals of the Stokowski method while skilfully moulding it gradually towards his own ends. A Handel *Water Music* from 1946 (Columbia) sounds disastrously overcooked to modern ears trained in the ways of Gustav Leonhardt or Trevor Pinnock, and his earliest Philadelphia recordings – including a Brahms Double for RCA with Jascha Heifetz and Emanuel Feuermann (1939), a Gershwin *Rhapsody in Blue* with Oscar Levant for Columbia (1945) and a Rimsky-Korsakov *Sheherazade* (1962) – have a tendency towards a positivistic determination to get the job done, with Levant adding necessary tinsel, and Heifetz and Feuermann sounding as though they are knuckling down to a duel.

In 1965, Ormandy made the first recording of Mahler's Symphony No 10 in the version by Deryck Cooke (Sony) – a record of high-strung dramatic concentration that did much to seal the reputation of Cooke's completion. A Tchaikovsky *Pathétique* from 1968 – a comfortless reading of the string-centric finale in particular – also demonstrated Ormandy at his best, and his recordings of symphonies by Nielsen and Shostakovich's later symphonies are thoughtful, Urtext performances of then unfamiliar material. I've always had a fondness for Ormandy's recording of Gershwin's Piano Concerto in F with Philippe Entremont for CBS (1967). The motoric rhythms, the big-band brass blasts, the spunky sheets-of-sounds provided by the orchestral soloists – that's impressive stuff by any standards. And Ormandy really sounds like he's enjoying the ride. G

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Eugene Ormandy conducts Tchaikovsky
Philadelphia Orchestra / Eugene Ormandy
RCA Red Seal

PHOTOGRAPHY: PICTORIAL PRESS LTD/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Instrumental



Harriet Smith admires Denis Kozhukhin's new Brahms disc:

'In some hands, the more driven of the Op 116 Fantasies can come across as a tad stroppy, but there's no risk of that here' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 63



Jeremy Nicholas revels in piano music from the belle époque:

'Anne Queffélec mixes the familiar with the less well known, with enough of the latter to entice any pianophile' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 71

JS Bach

Italian Concerto, BWV971. Partitas – No 1, BWV825; No 3, BWV827.
Four Duets, BWV802-805.
Fantasia and Fugue, BWV944.
Jesu, joy of man's desiring (arr Hess)
Rafał Blechacz *pf*
DG Ⓕ 479 5534GH (66' • DDD)



The Polish pianist Rafał Blechacz, particularly lauded for his Chopin interpretations, now turns to Bach, a composer with whom he has enjoyed a long association, having studied organ as well as piano in his younger days. It's a strikingly personal programme and he launches it with an account of the *Italian Concerto* that exudes confidence from the off, revelling in contrasts of dynamics and Bach's punchy counterpoint. Tharaud is rather more elegant here, though Blechacz is beautifully refined in the central *Andante*, while his finale has an infectious one-in-a-bar verve.

The Fantasia and Fugue in A minor is impressive too, the latter a dazzling affair, not least for Blechacz's sheer control over the textures at quiet dynamics. I found the Four Duets less successful: while he delights in the angularity of the Second, it's not the most subtle of readings; the Third is a bit short on joy; and as a set they sound just a touch didactic.

He is patently a pianist who enjoys Bach's extremes – the closing Gigue of the First Partita is as fleet as Anderszewski's but it's relatively monochrome alongside his compatriot's feeling for light and shade. The Sarabande, on the other hand, is wonderfully confiding and unerringly paced. And his way with Bach's counterpoint is unfailingly imaginative – notably in the opening Fantasia of the Third Partita and its brief Scherzo. The concluding Gigue is, in Blechacz's hands, a big and muscly affair. Goode, at a similar speed, is more refined, while Anderszewski does something extraordinary here: taking it surprisingly slowly, he turns it into a sombre, inward lament, which seems perverse on paper but actually proves very effective.

Blechacz ends with *Jesu, joy* in the Hess arrangement. He is suitably soulful but I fear that his reading pales besides the classics of Hess herself (from 1928 onwards) and, of course, Lipatti (variously available). **Harriet Smith**

Partitas Nos 1 & 3 – selected comparisons:
Anderszewski (1/03) (VIRG/ERAT) 5455262-5
Goode (7/03) (NONE) 7559 79698-2
Italian Concerto – selected comparison:
Tharaud (9/05) (HARM) HMC90 1871
Jesu, joy of man's desiring – selected comparison:
Hess (5/13) (APR) APR7504

JS Bach

Six Keyboard Partitas, BWV825-830
Richard Egarr *hpd*
Harmonia Mundi Ⓜ ② HMM90 7593/4 (154' • DDD)



Like his traversals of the *English* and *French Suites*, Richard Egarr's Bach Partitas largely convey a rhythmic focus that underlines the music's dance origins, in contrast with the harpsichordist's relatively looser-limbed *Well-Tempered Clavier* and *Goldberg Variations* recordings. Rather than broach the Gigues as virtuoso showpieces, Egarr gives the phrases room to sing and breathe, without allowing occasional agogic stresses to derail the flow of the basic pulse. Nor do embellishments on repeats obliterate the original melodies. The Allemandes have more conversational wiggle room than usual, although the D major Allemande's protracted pacing and overlapping finger legato are rather heavy going compared to Christophe Rousset's lighter and faster elegance. The G major Praeambulum's florid runs and dramatic pauses transpire at a low-energy trot, while, conversely, the D major and E minor Partitas' grand opening introductions are refreshingly animated and businesslike. Similarly, the A minor Partita alternates between bracingly incisive (the splendidly articulated Corrente) and boringly limp (the sedate Scherzo).

However, Egarr's Sarabandes are worth the price of admission. Here he takes ownership of his slow-motion comfort zone, unleashing imaginatively wrought embellishments with controlled freedom; I've never heard Egarr fuse heart, mind and fingers to such a soulful degree. It also doesn't hurt that Harmonia Mundi's engineering beautifully reproduces the dulcet colours characterising the Katzman harpsichord's quill plectra. Should you want a Partita cycle that splits the difference between Rousset's extroversion and the intimately wrought Masaaki Suzuki edition, Egarr just might fit the bill.
Jed Distler

Selected comparisons:
Rousset (9/93) (LOIL) ➧ *475 7079*
Suzuki (4/03) (BIS) BIS-CD1313/14

JS Bach

'Organ Works, Vol 2'
Chorale Partita, BWV768.
Concertos after Vivaldi – BWV594; BWV596.
Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier – BWV730; BWV731.
Preludes and Fugues – BWV541; BWV547
Masaaki Suzuki *org*
BIS Ⓕ SACD BIS2241 (71' • DDD)
Played on the Marc Garnier organ of the Shoin Chapel, Kobe, Japan



Far from the all-purpose grandiloquence of the Martinikerk in Groningen – where Masaaki Suzuki recorded his most recent Bach recital (10/15) – the Garnier organ in Kobe offers us with a rather more unusual context for Bach. The instrument is broadly constructed in the French style from around 1700, with its decidedly fruity mean-tone tuning. While the Shoin



'Technical command, intelligence and communicative flair': Sunwook Kim impresses in Beethoven – see review on page 62

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARTIN JEHNICHEN

Chapel represents Suzuki's spiritual home (a place where he returned to build a career after study in the Netherlands and in which the complete series of Bach cantatas was recorded), the specific musical reasons for choosing this location soon become evident in performances of deep-seated understanding, colour and vitality.

The symmetrical layout of the programme embodies the kind of parlour game that Bach would have appreciated – a pair of Preludes and Fugues framing the whole, working towards the middle with two versions of the same chorale prelude, two Vivaldi transcriptions and with the great 20-minute chorale partita *Sei gegrüsset* as the fulcrum. The structure serves a significant purpose, as we soon discover. Suzuki's climb to the heart of the partita is made all the more searching because the palate seems ideally prepared for the richly diverse registrations that characterise the organist's eloquent reading.

Indeed, the variations on 'Sei gegrüsset', bursting as it is with a serious young composer's desire to pay homage to his possible teacher Georg Böhm, fit round the Garnier's quixotic turns like a glove. Var 5 quacks with a naturalist's delight and the penultimate variation offers such subtly complementary timbres between chorale and paraphrase as to capture perfectly the inner thread of the work's open-hearted faith.

The C major works are intermittently compromised by the organ's 'tough' mean-tone tuning but Suzuki's exceptional rhetorical placement and fine judgement prevails. The Groningen volume may enjoy a greater kaleidoscopic range than this reflective and carefully navigated recital but Suzuki never disappoints. In fact, quite the opposite: this volume says 'Vol 2' (the first disc had no number) and so we anticipate a series that will take Bach into new spheres while also thrillingly recalling the great Piet Kee, Suzuki's teacher.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

JS Bach

'Bach Reimagines Bach'
Solo Violin Sonata No 1, BWV1001.
Lute Suites – No 3, BWV995; No 4, BWV1006*a*
William Carter *lute*
Linn Ⓕ CKD445 (66' • DDD)



'So here are 3 degrees of reimagination for your consideration. My own minimalist effort, Bach's mild refashioning of BWV1006 with a bass line and some ornaments, and then the wonderful transmutation that is BWV995. I hope they all give pleasure!'

Indeed they do. Guitarist and lutenist extraordinaire, continuo player to the stars Bill Carter, who in typically cheerful mood ends his entertaining and informative booklet-note with the above, has finally ventured forth into the miniature universe that is JS Bach's music for solo lute (after Bach's own works for solo violin or cello), following years exploring more far-flung regions such as the Baroque guitar music of Francesco Corbetta and Santiago de Murcia. It has been worth the wait.

Carter was a student of Nigel North, whose complete recordings of Bach's solo violin and cello music transcribed for lute is one of the jewels in Linn Records' crown. He brings his former teacher's devotion to

seeing Bach's music as a language in which one must strive to be fluent with an ear for the colouristic possibilities of the lute born of years performing with orchestras and chamber ensembles.

Thus there is the soloist's suppleness and flexibility of phrase; but there is also the obvious enjoyment of pure sonority and tints and shades of tone. These qualities are most evident in the freer preludes of the G minor Sonata and Suite; but there is a lovely use of *notes inégales* in the Siciliana and the Courante of both suites as well, while other dance movements benefit from Carter's deceptively subtle, distinctive imagination.

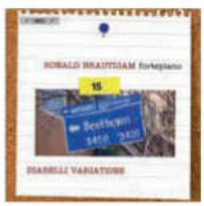
Tempos are, when compared with a player such as Hopkinson Smith's in the same works, somewhat on the leisurely side. That's because Carter isn't in a hurry to get anywhere. He arrived a long time ago. **William Yeoman**

Beethoven

Variations on a Waltz by Anton Diabelli, Op 120. Six National Airs With Variations, Op 105

Ronald Brautigam *fp*

BIS Ⓕ BIS1943 (68' • DDD/DSD)



The number of pianists who have recorded memorable accounts of the *Diabelli* Variations is surprisingly small. Among long-established classic versions, the names of Schnabel, Rosen, Kovacevich and Brendel immediately come to mind – and, of course, Rudolf Serkin: distinguished mentor of Ronald Brautigam, who emerges here as the second pianist to record a plausible account of the *Diabelli* using an instrument of the period.

How the waltz theme itself is played is often a useful pointer to what follows. Brautigam's articulation, like Serkin's, calls to mind Donald Tovey's description of Diabelli's theme as 'healthy, unaffected, dry, energetic'. That's a fair characterisation of the work itself, which is why the best performances of this encyclopaedic distillation of Beethoven's genius as a composer for the piano deliver the music with the directness of an engraver pressing his image to the page.

Brautigam's instrument is a copy of an 1822 Graf by the distinguished piano maker Paul McNulty. All we know of the instrument on which Andreas Staier made his in many ways admirable 2010 Harmonia Mundi recording is that it is 'a fortepiano after Conrad Graf'. Staier clearly relishes the Graf's sonic potential: witness the bassoon-stop drone he deploys in the cod-Mozart Variation 22 or the 'janissary' stop (a wire coil struck by a pedal-operated hammer) which he uses to bizarre effect in the toccata-like Var 23.

Brautigam deploys no such devices. Take the profoundly mysterious Var 20. Where Staier uses the fortepiano's pedal shifts and felt-covered moderator stop to conjure up velvet-soft sonorities, Brautigam (playing a little too loudly perhaps) is interested only in the musical essence – in this instance, the perfectly articulated sounding of those weird chordal progressions which dot the landscape like the stones of some ancient henge. That mindset, and Brautigam's superior technique in the fierier variations, is the difference between the two performances. Aficionados of old pianos may prefer Staier's approach but lovers of the *Diabelli* itself are more likely to find fresh interest in Brautigam's period take on a classic reading.

Brautigam's fill-up reworks for solo piano the *Six National Airs With Variations* for piano with flute or violin which Beethoven wrote for publisher George Thomson in 1818. Thomson was aghast at their difficulty but on this occasion Thomson's despair can be our delight. **Richard Osborne**

Diabelli Variations – selected comparisons:
Serkin (4/59[R]) (SONY) 88691 98830-2
Kovacevich (1/69[R]) (PHIL) 475 7556POR
Brendel (11/77[R]) (PHIL) 426 232-2PH
Staier (8/12) (HARM) HMC90 2091

Beethoven

Piano Sonatas – No 8, 'Pathétique', Op 13; No 14, 'Moonlight', Op 27 No 2; No 23, 'Appassionata', Op 57

Sunwook Kim *pf*

Accentus Ⓕ ACC30409 (60' • DDD)



The still-young winner of the 2006 Leeds Competition presented his Beethoven credentials more than impressively with the *Hammerklavier* and *Waldstein* last year (1/16). For his follow-up he stays with familiar named sonatas, and the results are, if anything, even more striking.

Kim is blessed with technical command, intelligence and communicative flair in equal measure and at a very high level. The first of these is hard to miss: the treacherous outer movements of the *Appassionata* are crystal-clear, even under the greatest dramatic strain, and the finale of the *Moonlight* goes at the fullest of *Presto agitatos*, without the slightest suspicion of gabble. Unlike many, including even some household names, his sound never grates in *fortissimo*, and again that's not for want of forcefulness. Nor is there any fault to be found with his cantabile and legato. These strengths are never indulged in for their own sake. Kim has an unerring sense of underlying harmonic tension and tonal design, plus the skill to apply colour and blend accordingly, which gives his playing both eloquence and architectural solidity and saves him from having to rely on gimmicky exaggeration to make his mark.

No buts, really. Could he be even more daring in places? Perhaps, and perhaps he will be when the time is right. Perhaps the first-movement *Grave* introduction in the *Pathétique* is so spaced-out as to feel like special pleading; but it works out in the longer term as the polar opposite to the *Sturm und Drang* main sections. Perhaps the more connoisseur-like of Beethoven's sonatas will find Kim wanting as an interpreter; but on this evidence I certainly wouldn't bank on it. Recording quality is splendid, incidentally, Berlin's Jesus-Christus-Kirche, as captured here, offering the optimum in clarity, warmth and impact. **David Fanning**
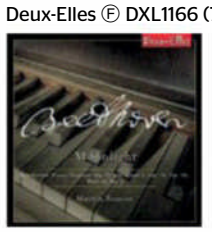
Beethoven

Piano Sonatas, Vol 6 – 'Moonlight'

Piano Sonatas – No 13, 'Quasi una fantasia', Op 27 No 1; No 14, 'Moonlight', Op 27 No 2; No 15, 'Pastoral', Op 28; No 22, Op 54; WoO47 No 2

Martin Roscoe *pf*

Deux-Elles Ⓕ DXL1166 (78' • DDD)



As Martin Roscoe crosses the halfway point towards completing his Beethoven sonata cycle for Deux-Elles, his poised and scrupulous playing continues to evoke two ghosts of Beethoven past: Walter Gieseking and Solomon. These luminaries generally favoured clear textures, astute voice-leading, balance and symmetry, discreet use of the pedal and a kind of Classical reserve that contrasts with more combative, confrontational interpretations. So does Roscoe.

Notice, for example, his brilliant articulation of the sudden *Allegro* outburst

in Op 27 No 1's first movement, and the bouncy Scherzo's airy lope (Schnabel's remains the most rollicking and zany performance to date, however). The *Allegro* finale achieves its rhythmic momentum less through tempo per se than by way of Roscoe's subtly stinging accents and spot-on broken intervals. The *Moonlight*'s *Adagio* stands out for Roscoe's limpid finger legato and distinct textural strands, while the *Allegretto*'s well-contoured part-writing justifies the pianist's rounded-off conception. While one could take dictation from Roscoe's awesomely controlled *Presto* finale, he sacrifices dynamism and sweep in the process.

Within the slightly square parameters Roscoe sets in the *Pastoral*'s first movement one can glean thoughtfully calibrated gradations of touch and shading, as well as in the conversational interplay he brings to the *Andante*'s woodwind-like writing. He gooses the Scherzo's short, flickering phrases with occasional (and very subtle) accelerations, and takes the Rondo's finger-twisting coda in effortless stride. He begins Op 54's opening Menuetto at a more expansive tempo than you might expect but he speeds up when the right-hand octaves begin. While Roscoe's soft-grained understatement in the perpetual-motion *Allegretto* movement is more stylistically apt than, say, Sviatoslav Richter's speedy brilliance, he underplays the off-beat accents to a fault. No musical nor technical faults, however, concerning Roscoe's bracingly meticulous reading of the adolescent Beethoven's F minor Sonata WoO47 No 2 (the second of his three so-called 'Elector' Sonatas). Listeners whose internal Beethoven sonata barometers read 'intimate' rather than 'cosmic' will respond to the stature and high standards of Roscoe's artistry.

Jed Distler

Brahms

Four Ballades, Op 10. Seven Piano Pieces, Op 116. Theme and Variations, Op 18*b*

Denis Kozhukhin *pf*

Pentatone Ⓕ PTC5186 568 (57' • DDD/DSD)



Pentatone has given Denis Kozhukhin a beautifully warm acoustic for this Brahms recording, setting his performances in the best possible light. He begins with Brahms's adaptation of the variation movement of the First String Sextet, proffered as a birthday present to Clara Schumann in 1860. Kozhukhin is alive to the work's Baroque feel, which emanates from the archaic-sounding D minor theme, and the hymnic fourth variation, with its turn to the major, is particularly beautifully rendered. Ohlsson is less orchestrally rich in the theme itself and a little more straightforward in manner, and Kozhukhin finds a greater degree of inwardness.

Plowright's recent account of the Op 10 Ballades was deeply impressive, and so is this new reading, even if neither can rival Sokolov in sheer reactivity. Kozhukhin avoids sounding ponderous in the outer sections of the Second Ballade thanks to his relatively flowing tempo – and in its driving inner section he is never merely vehement. The Fourth Ballade is another highlight, the melodic line beautifully drawn out of the texture.

In some hands, the more driven of the Op 116 Fantasies can come across as a tad stroppy, but there's no risk of that here. The first of the set has strength and power but also a ringing tone and an eagerness to unearth its playfulness, and its yearning too. In the fourth piece, Angelich makes life easier for himself with a slightly more flowing tempo than Kozhukhin but ultimately it's Richard Goode who really sets the benchmark in these pieces, making everything sound so inevitable. That said, I'm very taken with what Kozhukhin has to say in this music.

Harriet Smith

Ballades – selected comparisons:
Sokolov (A/02) (NAIV) OP30366
Plowright (4/17) (BIS) BIS2137
Theme and Variations – selected comparison:
Ohlsson (11/10) (HYPE) CDA67777
Piano Pieces – selected comparisons:
Angelich (4/07) (VIRG) 379302-2
Goode (NONE) 7559 79154-2

Chopin

Berceuse, Op 57. Mazurkas – No 2, Op 6 No 2; No 5, Op 7 No 1; No 7, Op 7 No 3; Nos 10-13, Op 17; Nos 14-17, Op 24; Nos 18-21, Op 30; Nos 22-25, Op 33. Nocturne No 5, Op 15 No 2. Preludes – No 25, Op 45; No 26, Op *posth*

Ivana Gavrić *pf*

Edition Records Ⓕ EDN1086 (70' • DDD)



Since they offer so little opportunity for display, it's perhaps no surprise that the Mazurkas should be somewhat less favoured than other genres by pianists seeking to make their mark in Chopin. Ivana Gavrić cannily exploits this gap, showing show how good taste and solid technical accomplishment can reap rewards. It's hard to imagine anyone raising objections to her stylish, unexaggerated readings. And that's not intended as a backhanded compliment, or as a hint that her temperament is in any way bland. She finds just the right weight for the melancholy of the A minor, Op 17 No 4, and the right degree of exaltation when Chopin's imagination takes flight. It was an excellent idea to intersperse





Ivan Gavrić played Chopin Mazurkas with 'good taste and solid technical accomplishment'

the mazurkas with the Berceuse and the odd prelude, nocturne and waltz.

All the same, I would love to hear what Gavrić would do with some of these pieces as encores, when the pressure to prove herself was off and she could play with more abandon. Quite unfairly to her, I put on some Arthur Rubinstein for comparison (including his miraculous account of the Berceuse – Philips, 10/98). And since my shelves are hardly groaning with CDs of the Mazurkas, I dug out my old Westminster LPs of Ryszard Bakst for good measure (can it really be that they never made it to CD?). Here, as I suspected, I found the extra lilt, charm, nuance and tonal shades I had been craving. Gavrić's instrument sounds well enough recorded, but I wonder if it imposed slight limitations on her colouristic range.

A nice bonus on the new disc is Ateş Orga's essay, or rather series of vignettes, built around quotes from commentators ranging from Chopin's contemporaries (damning as well as laudatory) to TS Eliot and Cortot, by way of such curiosities as Gertrude Hudson's description of the F sharp Nocturne as 'quite Persian in style'.

David Fanning

Liszt

Études d'exécution transcendante d'après Paganini, S140. Grandes études de Paganini, S141. Variations sur Le Carnaval de Venise de Paganini, S700*a*

Wojciech Waleczek *pf*

Capriccio Ⓕ C5276 (80' • DDD)



The last time Wojciech Waleczek appeared in these pages was in May 2015, when he and violinist Voytek Proniewcz came up with an interesting programme of little-known Liszt works including the Duo Sonata, S127. In this piece and elsewhere, I wrote, Waleczek is kept pretty busy and 'gives every indication of enjoying the challenges'. Unfortunately, on this new disc, far from giving the impression of enjoyment, he seems daunted by the challenges, meeting them with caution in some of the most flat-footed, pedestrian performances of these studies I have heard.

The running order is exactly the same as that on Goran Filipec's disc (Naxos, 6/16), even down to the concluding filler of the Variations on *The Carnival of Venice*; the nine original (1838) *Paganini* Études are preceded by the six more familiar studies in the revised and slightly simplified versions of 1851. Filipec's was a disc I welcomed last year and marginally preferred to Leslie Howard's Hyperion disc recorded 20 years ago (despite the latter's superior booklet). I readily admit that speed is not the be-all and end-all of virtuoso pieces but it counts for an awful lot when the whole *raison d'être* is to dazzle and astonish. A few comparisons will suffice: Filipec in Nos 1-3 of the revised version – 4'30", 5'10" and 4'28" respectively; Waleczek in the same studies – 5'25", 5'55" and 5'07". Filipec's *Carnaval de Venise* – 5'22"; Waleczek's – 6'41". Trifonov's Paganini-Liszt studies on his recent two-CD set (DG, 10/16) falls somewhere between the two but is alive with mischief and imagination.

Waleczek produces a rich, burnished tone and has been very well recorded but his is not ultimately, I'm afraid, a competitive version. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Liszt

'Complete Piano Music, Vol 45'

Grandes études, S137

Wenbin Jin *pf*

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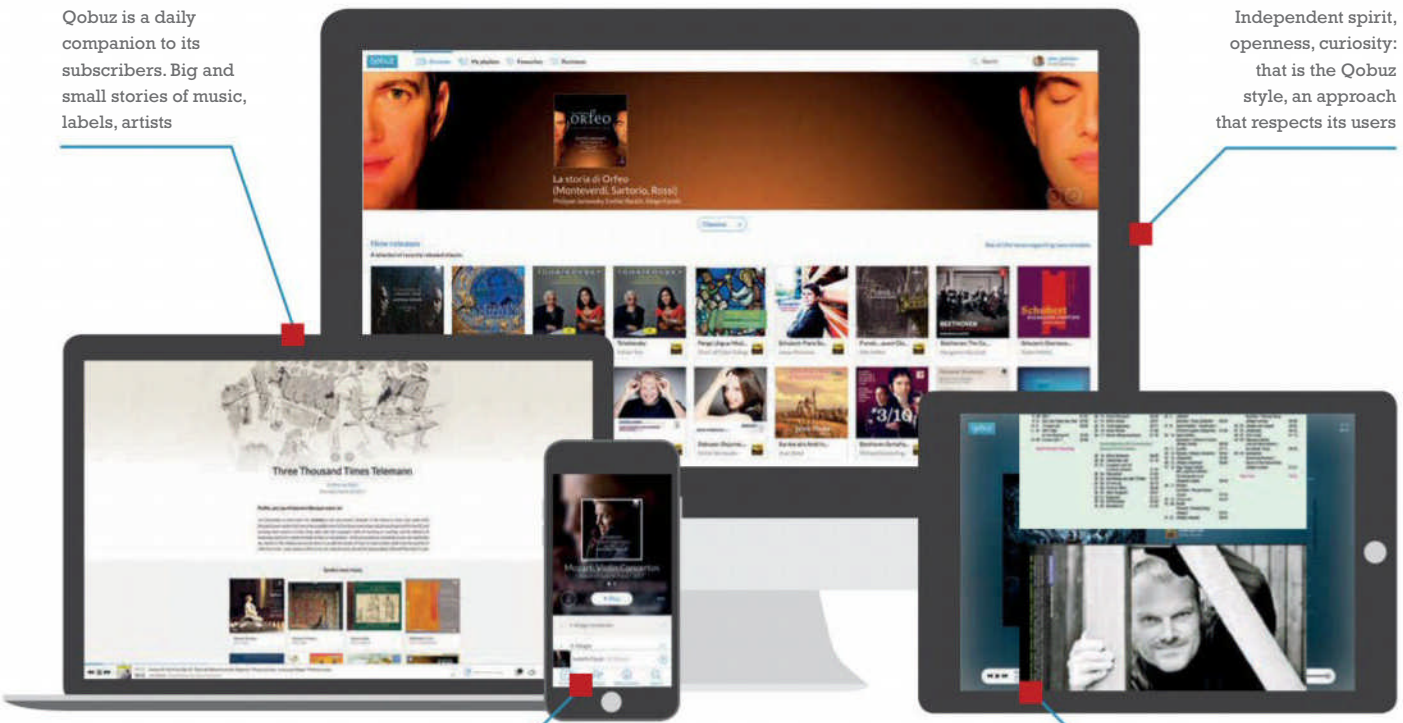
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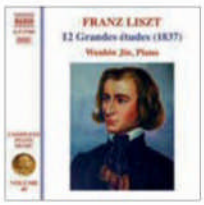
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A bit of housekeeping: this disc is of the first concert versions (S137, from 1837) of the monumental *Douze Études d'exécution transcendante* (S139, from 1851), which appeared on Vol 2 of Naxos's ongoing series of Liszt's complete piano music and which had their origins in the *Étude en douze exercices* (S136) which Liszt wrote at the tender age of 14.

Listening to Wenbin Jin play these ferociously demanding pieces only increases one's admiration for Leslie Howard's Herculean traversal of the complete works – single-handed, as it were. There are an awful lot of notes and, as Howard himself puts it, an 'almost absurd level of difficulty that lends [the 1837 set] a particular devil-may-care quality'. No one in their right mind would willingly learn and play this earlier set in preference to the revised versions – less, in the latter case, is more – but, nevertheless, 'the music value of [S137] remains incontestable' (Howard again). They are 'studies in musical expression seen through the virtue of complete technical accomplishment'.

Although the 12 studies of S137 can be appreciated independently, they are more fascinating when complemented with a knowledge of the familiar later versions. Keith Anderson's Naxos booklet charts some of the major differences (Leslie Howard's for Vol 34 of his Hyperion series is far more detailed).

Wenbin Jin hurls himself into these treacherous waters with due abandon, exploiting the full tonal resources of his instrument, vividly captured with a highly projected treble register. If Liszt played these pieces with the same level of ferocity it is no wonder that his recitals were a litany of snapped strings and broken hammers. Certainly some of the writing, such as the opening of Study No 8, must have been far easier to accomplish with the lighter actions of the 1830s, and as Liszt piles Pelion on Ossa, Wenbin Jin becomes ever more like Horatius before the River-gate taking on all comers. It's a remarkable display of pianistic stamina and doggedness.

The portrait of the young Liszt on the cover is even worse than the one by the same artist on Vol 42. Surely there must be something better. **Jeremy Nicholas**

PHOTOGRAPHY: HENNING ROSS FOTOGRAFIE



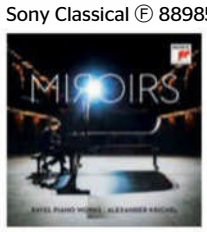
'Shimmering surfaces and gossamer textures': Alexander Krichel shows a deep affinity for the music of Ravel

Ravel

Gaspard de la nuit. Miroirs. Le tombeau de Couperin

Alexander Krichel *pf*

Sony Classical Ⓕ 88985 37764-2 (79' • DDD)



Few pianists can claim a more impressive recording debut than Alexander Krichel's masterful Liszt recital in 2011 (Telos/Profil). It was followed by two concerto releases, the first offering works by Mozart, Hummel and Chopin and a second with Rachmaninov's Second Concerto and the *Moments musicaux* (both Sony Classical) as well as another solo disc with a mixed Romantic programme. All these suggest a steady career trajectory and artistic growth unencumbered by external pressures. Krichel, a Hamburg native who turns 28 this year, has now released an all-Ravel disc, replete with shimmering surfaces and gossamer textures beautifully captured by the Sony engineers.

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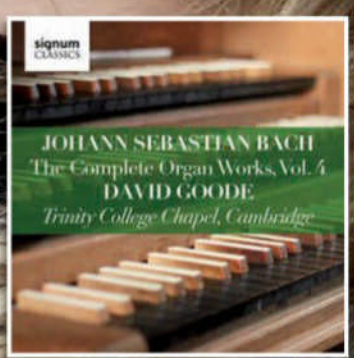
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Luca Buratto, winner of the Honens International Piano Competition in 2015, makes his debut recording with Schumann

PHOTOGRAPHY: MONIQUE DE ST CROIX

Krichel favours steadier tempos than the norm, with minimal rubato and judicious pedalling that keeps Ravel's wealth of detail in sharp focus. His extraordinary *leggiero* playing is natural, agile and graceful, radiating an emotional health that is refreshingly free of any hint of exhibitionism. If one occasionally wishes for a stronger sense of harmonic direction, those moments are rare.

Moods can alter in a second, as when the trio of an otherwise jaunty 'Rigaudon' turns strangely lonely or the prevailing ease and playfulness of 'Alborada' gives way to agonisingly questioning recitatives. Textures run the gamut from the sumptuous to the skeletal. 'Une barque sur l'océan', for instance, is as richly evocative as any canvas by Turner, while the shadows cast by the demon 'Scarbo' are all the more terrifying for their elusiveness. The identity of individual pieces contributes to the overall shape of an entire suite. *Le tombeau de Couperin* maintains a simplicity of utterance that is dispelled only in the final pages of the Toccata, which seem to burst forth like fireworks at Versailles.

Bertrand Chamayou's complete traversal of all the piano music last year has set a high bar for Ravel players. Nonetheless, Krichel's deep affinity for the composer is obvious and his readings have a cast all their own. His understated originality is always consistent with Ravel's admonition to Marguerite Long that, rather than interpretation, his music requires realisation. **Patrick Rucker**

Piano Works – selected comparison:
Chamayou (3/16) (ERAT) 2564 60268-1

Schumann

Blumenstück, Op 19. Davidsbündlertänze, Op 6. Humoreske, Op 20
Luca Buratto *pf*
Hyperion Ⓕ CDA68186 (65' • DDD)



A critic colleague wrote of a particularly flawless yet featureless interpretation that it had 'all of the perfection of waxed fruit'. These exact words come to mind throughout Luca Buratto's Schumann *Humoreske*. Have the opening *Einfach* and *Sehr rasch und leicht* sections ever sounded this expressively neutral and prefabricated? Compare Buratto alongside his label-mate Angela Hewitt (12/07) and you'll hear much more music in Hewitt's arched phrases, melodically shaped bass lines, crisper articulation and superior attention to dynamics.

Buratto's energetic momentum creates the right kind of dramatic build in the *Hastig* section's central climaxes, yet one misses the poetic disquiet that András Schiff divines from the inner voices (ECM, 7/02). In addition, the Intermezzo's two-handed semiquaver patterns grow increasingly heavy and emphatic, lacking the youthful élan and textural interplay distinguishing youthfully spirited live recordings by the 76-year-old Horowitz. Burrato plays Schumann's lovely and somewhat underrated *Blumenstücke* simply and directly. It's a pleasing performance in and of itself, but a tad anonymous next to Eric Le Sage's more potent left-hand work (Alpha) or Horowitz's ability to ignite a phrase with the tiniest accent.

Holding together all 18 pieces in *Davidsbündlertänze* can be a challenge, yet Buratto's well-considered tempo

relationships and full-bodied textures convey a symphonic orientation characterised by less rubato and melodic inflection than usual. As a consequence, one loses the elfin lightness of No 6's darting left-hand triplets or No 8's 'stride piano' bass/chord leaps, while No 12's *Mit Humor* directive is tempered in a reading that eschews the 'standard' hesitations and punched-up italicisations. Notice, too, how No 7's headlong, expressively discreet rolled chords contrast to interpretations where the melody line subjectively assumes centre stage. In short, while more playful, spontaneous and nimble *Davidsbündlertänze* recordings exist (with Schiff, Hewitt, Perahia and Anda among my favourites), Buratto's cohesive solidity deserves admiration and respect, as do Misha Donat's annotations and Hyperion's usual high sonic standard.

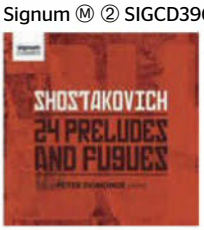
Jed Distler

Shostakovich

Preludes and Fugues, Op 87

Peter Donohoe *pf*

Signum Ⓜ ② SIGCD396 (148' • DDD)



Although the American critic BH Haggin erred on the wrong side of history when he called Shostakovich's 24 Preludes and Fugues 'arid', one can understand his verdict. These aren't the kind of piano pieces that 'play themselves', in a manner of speaking. They require a sympathetic musician equipped with the technique and temperament to reveal the music's subtle textural interplay and expressive variety.

Peter Donohoe's clean-cut and perceptive keyboard workmanship attests to a natural affinity for this composer's idiom, as numerous details bear out. He imbues the G minor's meditative aura with a lovely singing legato and holds the B minor Prelude's dotted 'French overture' basic rhythm to a firmer, more resolute standard than most. The G sharp minor Prelude's passacaglia is less deliberate and monumental than usual, with a refreshing sense of forward motion, while its companion Fugue's zigzag asymmetry manages to sound jazzily casual yet rhythmically on the money, if not quite to Vladimir Ashkenazy's crisp and nimble specifications.

By taking the B flat minor Fugue's *Adagio* marking with a grain of salt, while honoring Shostakovich's *legatissimo* directive to the maximum, Donohoe's conversational and rhythmically strict handling of the three-part counterpoint illuminates the rarely noticed dance behind the music's dirge-like countenance. And speaking of dance, Donohoe's ideal pacing for the B major Prelude's perky gavotte and the humourously accented Fugue that follows evokes appropriate parallels with Shostakovich's potent theatre scores. While Donohoe's emphatically arpeggiated chords throughout the D major Prelude are anything but *dolce*, his approach nevertheless brings a novel textural and linear element to a piece that's often casually dispatched. Also notice the pianist's pinpoint dynamic gradations that give uncommon distinction to the D major Fugue's closely proximate voices – easier said than done.

Certain readings succeed less than others. The blandly phrased all-white keys C major Fugue seems interminable compared to the tension and release that Keith Jarrett generates, despite the latter's perversely slow tempo (ECM, 9/92). Donohoe's A minor Fugue starts out in neutral yet becomes more incisive and faster as it proceeds, while he tends to telegraph the big D minor Fugue's climaxes, in contrast with the more assiduous dynamic architecture distinguishing Craig Sheppard's live recording (Roméo, 12/15), or the version in the first and finest of Tatiana Nikolayeva's three cycles (1962, now on Doremi). Still, on the whole, one cannot dispute Donohoe's high standards and musical intelligence, not to mention his superb and perceptive booklet-notes. I'm happy to have Donohoe on hand, although I won't give up my reference Ashkenazy and Jenny Lin Shostakovich cycles.

Jed Distler

Selected comparisons:

Ashkenazy (6/99R) (DECC) 475 7425DC5

Lin (HANS) CD98 530

Haochen Zhang

Brahms Three Piano Pieces, Op 117

Janáček Piano Sonata 1.X.1905, 'From the Streets' **Liszt** Ballade No 2, S171

Schumann Kinderszenen, Op 15

Haochen Zhang *pf*

BIS Ⓕ BIS2238 (66' • DDD/DSD)



Haochen Zhang first came to my attention through an excellent selection of live performances from the 2009 International Van Cliburn Competition, where Zhang shared the Gold Medal victory with Nobuyuki Tsujii. Judging from his first studio release for BIS, Zhang has evidently been honing and fine-tuning his artistry, arguably to a fault.

It's fashionable for young pianists to over-interpret Schumann's *Kinderszenen* in quest of Argerichisms or Horowitzisms. Zhang, however, will have none of that, yet his aim for lightness, transparency and directness yields poetic results. How much more interesting and sophisticated the ubiquitous 'Traümerei' sounds without overwrought accents and contrived pedal effects, and when is the last time you heard such a disarmingly lilting 'Ritter vom Steckenpferd'? Schumann's hobby horse claims its rightful place after too many bucking broncos hogging the catalogue.

In contrast to the rhetorical heft and dramatic trajectory served up by Claudio Arrau, Zhang views Liszt's B minor Ballade more as a free-flowing fantasy. One can argue, though, that the broken octaves sacrifice their inherent *agitato* urgency for surface suavity, and that Zhang races through each reiteration of the major-key *Allegretto* theme as if he were embarrassed by its sentiment. With the final peroration, Zhang opts for Liszt's rarely performed *ossia* alternative text consisting of booming chords, as opposed to the rippling ascending scales that nearly everyone else plays: he ploughs through those chords, sidestepping the composer's *grandioso* directive.

The rounded edges and polished passagework characterising Zhang's Janáček are pianistically impressive, yet he glides over the music's stark aura and speech-like syntax. Just compare Zhang's relatively glib first movement's unison phrases to the shapely rhythmic inflections of Firkušný, Moravec or Schiff, and you'll understand what's missing.

Zhang handles Brahms's E flat Intermezzo with kid gloves and basically underplays, while smoothing out the cross-rhythmic phrase groupings. The B flat minor is similarly misty-eyed, texturally mushy – indeed overpedalled at times, with almost none of the firmly etched counterpoint you hear from Rubinstein and Kempff. Zhang's broadly paced C sharp minor is fuller in body, grander in design and better sustained all round; a convincing

alternative to the brisker, terser, more classically orientated readings that I generally prefer. The fine recorded sound registers with even more lifelike resonance via SACD multichannel playback. All told, an uneven recital, capped by a winning *Kinderszenen*.

Jed Distler

'Abbey Spectacular!'

JS Bach Air on the G String (arr Cook). Toccata and Fugue, BWV540
Coates London Suite – Westminster (arr Cook)
Cocker Tuba Tune **Dupré** Prélude et Fugue, Op 7 No 1 **Elgar** Pomp and Circumstance March No 1 (arr Lemare) **Grainger** Handel in the Strand (arr Stockmeier) **Vierne** Carillon de Westminster, Op 54 No 6
Walton Orb and Sceptre (arr McKie)
Whitlock Fantasie Choral No 1
Daniel Cook *org*
Priory Ⓕ PRCD1175 (78' • DDD)
Played on the organ of Westminster Abbey



The London thread running through this programme is understandable, but I am not sure it makes much musical sense. Nor does it need to, for this disc focuses on the instrument, and with Priory's hallmark understanding of the organ, we get to hear this fabulous Harrison & Harrison in fabulous sound. Daniel Cook gives a whole new meaning to the phrase 'Cook's tour' as he strides knowingly around the instrument's 100-plus stops providing musical snapshots of the more notable ones.

Walton's march for the Queen's coronation in the Abbey, arranged by the then organist Sir William McKie, makes an invigorating opener. Walton would surely have relished the vitality with which Cook infuses his jazz-inspired rhythms. Bach aficionados, on the other hand, will not relish the thundering Englishness of Cook's take on the Toccata and Fugue in F – provided, that is, they have survived his sickly transcription of the 'Air on the G String'. Cocker's *Tuba Tune* will not disappoint tuba lovers, Whitlock's *Fantasie Choral* will appeal to Whitlock lovers (and convert none who are not), and excellent transcriptions of Elgar, Coates and Grainger will entertain everyone. If there is musical meat in this programme, it comes with the Vierne *Carillon de Westminster*, sounding magnificently at home on this majestic organ, and the scintillating Prelude and Fugue in B by Marcel Dupré which, in Cook's glittering performance, gives us all the kind of wow factor which Widor's Toccata used to until it got itself played to exhaustion.

All in all, a populist programme that does a little bit more than merely provide a superb sonic souvenir for the Abbey's countless visitors.

Marc Rochester

'Entrez dans la danse...'

Chabrier Feuillet d'album
Chausson Pavane **Debussy** Ballet[a]. Danse. Children's Corner – The Snow is Dancing. Pour la danseuse aux crotales[a] **Fauré** Le pas espagnol[a] **Franck** Danse lente
Hahn Danse de l'Amour et de l'Ennui. Danse de l'Amour et du Danger
Massenet Valse folle **Mompou** Canción y Danza No 4 **Pierné** Valse-Impromptu[a]
Poulenc Le bal fantôme. Bransle de Champagne. Pavane. Sicilienne
Ravel Menuet antique. Pavane pour une infante défunte. Valse noble et sentimentale No 2 **Ropartz** Ronde
Saint-Saëns Valse nonchalante
Satie Danse de travers
Schmitt Ronde des lettres boiteuses[a]
Anne Queffélec, [a]**Gaspard Dehaene** *pf*
Mirare Ⓕ MIR320 (82' • DDD)



GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

PIANOPHILE CORNER

Harriet Smith delves into the dustier corners of the Romantic piano repertory, from Busch to Stanchinsky



Scottish pianist Christopher Guild vibrantly brings to life the music of Ronald Stevenson

Six discs exploring very different pianistic byways, many featuring premiere recordings. The Russian **Alexey Stanchinsky** died in 1914 in mysterious circumstances (accident or suicide?) aged just 26. Ekaterina Derzhavina is clearly a true believer in the quality of his output, as her playing and thoughtful booklet-note demonstrate. The earliest pieces here are three *Songs Without Words*, written at 15, and if his music at times has a whiff of the young Scriabin about it, its sheer range of expression and idiom is striking. In the Op 1 *Sketches*, Stanchinsky plays with sonorities that range from the mildly Impressionist via the acerbic (No 8) to a chromatic passacaglia (No 9). He's able to make an impression in a very short space of time (as witness the grave C major Prelude) and the folk-tinged Sonata is full of striking ideas and textures, not least the mysterious second theme of the first movement, while the finale has a bustling clarity that is very infectious. Stanchinsky has in Derzhavina a first-rate advocate, alive to its colour and innovation.

Adolf Busch was born three years after Stanchinsky but outlived him by nearly four decades. Here we have his complete music for solo piano; not surprisingly given Busch's hectic performing life, most of it was written before he reached 30, with the remaining few pieces dating from the last decade of his life. Looking at the work titles, you could ascribe all this music to Brahms, and it is very much from that tradition that Busch comes, with more than a dash of Reger thrown into the harmonic mix. Toccata Classics has released two well-reviewed discs of Busch's chamber music but this is more problematic. Jakob Fichert is not helped by the boxy recording; but, more profoundly, nothing really takes flight and, from the opening Fantasia onwards, there's a distinct lack of rhetoric. Seriousness of intent is built into the fabric of much of Busch's music, but that's not to say it is without humanity or even a touch of wit. The Sonata from 1922 (of which Rudolf Serkin was a great advocate) is the best thing here in terms of performance but its more mysterious touches in the slow movement pass for little, while the finale is a pretty strenuous affair.

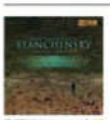
On to happier matters, and Toccata's second volume of **Ronald Stevenson**'s piano music impressively performed by the Scottish pianist Christopher Guild. The dual focus of this disc is works linked to folk traditions and music for the young – Stevenson feeling strongly that younger pianists needed real music. That's exactly what he provided in the *Three Scots Fairy Tales* which, with their rhythmic sleights of hand, are the equal of Bartók in his *Mikrokosmos*. That Stevenson was a great transcriber is abundantly demonstrated not only in *Rory Dall Morrison's Harp Book* but also in the *Hebridean Seascape*, which reimagines the slow movement of Frank Merrick's Second Piano Concerto, a colouristic tour de force, vibrantly brought to life by Guild. Other people's music is joyously evident elsewhere, not least in *A Carlyle Suite* (commissioned to mark the bicentenary of the birth of Thomas Carlyle), with its sneaky allusions to Chopin and a set of variations each of which parodies a particular style – the expressionist Recitative and March is a particularly biting affair. Guild provides his own compelling notes and he ends with a recording premiere, the touching *Lament for a Blind Harper*, movingly played.

From Scotland to Argentina and a disc of **Alberto Ginastera** from the German pianist Michael Korstick, an artist particularly associated with Beethoven (though more recently he has recorded surveys of Koechlin and Debussy). But boy, can he surmount the prodigious difficulties of Ginastera's music – not only technically but in grasping its spirit too. The vibrant *Danzas Argentinas*, Op 2, open the proceedings with aplomb; and in a classic such as the hypnotic *Malambo*, Op 7, Korstick is motoric without becoming percussive. The *American Preludes* are particularly impressive when the music is fast and furious – lyrical lines could have been sung a little more – but the sense of fun in the Op 19 Rondo is wonderfully caught and he dispatches the concise First and Third Sonatas with great élan.

There's some repertoire overlap with the Colombian pianist Pablo Rojas, who explores a wide range of **Latin American Piano Music** on his Gramola disc. In the *Suite de Danzas criollas* Royas, playing a closely recorded Blüthner, sounds a touch timid alongside Korstick, while the German finds a more natural pace for the *Milonga*, Op 3, Rojas sounding overly spacious here. Elsewhere in the recital, there's a disappointing lack of colour and sheer verve, the contrast between, say, Nazareth, Lecuona and Salgán going for relatively little. And, in Piazzolla's *Milonga del Ángel*, poetry is in short supply.

Jean Roger-Ducasse (1873-1954) was, in his time, much lauded and as a composer mixed with the A-listers, Debussy and Fauré among them. So this disc from Joel Hastings, who died last year at just 46, is a timely reminder of his composerly credentials. Roger-Ducasse's musical language is fundamentally more diatonic than Debussy or Ravel, particularly in the later works, the 1921 Impromptu seeming to be moving into a kind of Poulencian realm, a quality still more pronounced in the Romance (1923). Among the most striking pieces here is *Rythmes*, its shimmering, shifting textures most persuasively coloured by Hastings. The Prelude in A minor is yet another example – and a vivid one too – of French composers' obsession with all things Spanish, while the second of the *Quatre Études* is a twinklingly good-natured fugue. Altogether a fascinating snapshot of a composer who was a key figure on the French scene. G

THE RECORDINGS



Stanchinsky Piano Works
Ekaterina Derzhavina
Profil Ⓕ PH17003



Busch Complete Music for Solo Piano
Jakob Fichert
Toccata Classics Ⓕ TOCC0245



Stevenson Piano Music, Vol 2
Christopher Guild
Toccata Classics Ⓕ TOCC0388



Ginastera The Piano Music
Michael Korstick
CPO Ⓕ CPO555 069-2



Various Cpsrs Latin American Piano Music **Pablo Rojas**
Gramola Ⓕ 99115



Roger-Ducasse Piano Works
Joel Hastings
Grand Piano Ⓕ GP724

PHOTOGRAPHY: SUZANNE MITCHELL PHOTOGRAPHY



The same qualities as on her delightful cornucopia 'Satie & Compagnie' (4/13) are on display again in Anne Queffélec's programme of dances from the belle époque and inter-war periods in France. All the composers were either disciples or pupils of one another or personal friends. Stylistically, it is easy to hear the cross-references: 'Their works engaged in dialogue, nourished and interpenetrated each other', as the excellent booklet has it. You can hear Faure's *Le pas espagnol*, for instance, either as an affectionate tribute to or tongue-in-cheek pastiche of Chabrier. It was Fauré who provided early inspiration for the Catalan Federico Mompou, the sole outsider in nationality on this album (though not in terms of musical style) and whose *Canción y Danza* No 4 opens proceedings.

Again, Queffélec mixes the familiar with the less well known, with enough of the latter to entice any pianophile to invest and pianist to track down the sheet music (as an example, your reviewer has now finally got round to having a serious look at Poulenc's *Suite française*). Her approach to the music is one of enchanting simplicity. No show, no grandstanding; she beckons the listener to leave what they are doing, if they wish, and to come over and join her. Minimum pedal, lovely finger legato, each note of these economically scored pieces intimately projected and made to tell.

Le pas espagnol, mentioned above, is one of five (out of the 24) tracks in which Queffélec is joined by Gaspard Dehaene. Notwithstanding the exuberant nature of this and a few others (Massenet's *Valse folle* first among them), the general tenor of the 82-minute programme is one of reflection and introspection, a welcome balm, and warmly recommended. **Jeremy Nicholas**

'Handel in Ireland, Vol 1'

Anonymous Der arme Irische Junge. Aileen Aroon (arr Cunningham). Handel's Forest Music **CT Carter** Sonatina No 10, Op 6 **Geminiani** Vivement **Handel** Esther, HWV50 – Overture. Messiah, HWV56 – Overture (arr Walsh). Rinaldo – Vo far guerra (arr Babell). Suite No 7, HWV432 (arr Babell) **Roseingrave** Suite No 8 **Bridget Cunningham** *hpd*
Signum Ⓕ SIGCD478 (73' • DDD)



A nice idea this, to complement London Early Opera's 'Handel in Italy' and 'Handel at Vauxhall' series with a project focusing on the nine months Handel spent in Dublin in 1741-42 overseeing the premiere of *Messiah*, performances of several other oratorios and doubtless numerous smaller musical events.

Yet, while music-loving Dubliners must have become familiar with Handel the keyboard player, can the idea of him in Ireland be conjured in a harpsichord recital? Bridget Cunningham tries by including contemporary transcriptions (probably not by Handel) of the overtures to *Messiah* and *Esther* and of a strange little piece called *Forest Music* anecdotally said to have been written by Handel in Ireland (though nothing about that is certain). She adds her own arrangements of two folk melodies Handel is known to have admired (in one of which she doubles on harp), and works by the Irish-born Thomas Roseingrave and Charles Thomas Carter. William Babell's arrangements of arias from *Rinaldo* and an actual, proper Handel suite fill out the rest.

She does not always help herself, however, especially with her ordering, which seems to be governed more by genre than by ear. Babell's garrulous 'Vo far guerra' variations is a tiresome thing which gives the off-button a tempting appearance as early as track 2. How much better if she had introduced one of her delightful folk-song settings here to set a more glowing Irish tone, yet for some reason these are tucked away together at the end, too late to work their magic.

Cunningham plays on two strong and deep-toned harpsichords in a dryish acoustic that can be a touch tough on the ears and in places unforgiving to fingerwork. A little more imaginative use of spread chords might have softened things a little, especially in a piece like 'Lascia ch'io pianga'. Vol 2 of Handel in Ireland promises 'glorious orchestral and vocal music' – much more the ticket, I would say. **Lindsay Kemp**

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Toshio Hosokawa

Arnold Whittall explores the work of this remarkable Japanese composer inspired by nature and Eastern–Western affinities



How do you feel about a 70-minute CD that interleaves four of Vivaldi's Op 10 Recorder Concertos with the five (approximately) seven-minute instrumental movements that make up *Singing Garden in Venice* by the Japanese composer Toshio Hosokawa? You might expect – or fear – a typically 21st-century cultural confection, trendily postmodern in its mix of 'crossover' with confrontation. But I'd be surprised if such scepticism survived the actual listening experience. You can simply enjoy the radical differences between early-18th-century Baroque and early-21st-century modernism in the best kind of contemporary performances and recordings. And, because the incongruity of mere juxtaposition is avoided, you can also relish the elements of interaction and transformation that bring 'ancient' and 'modern' into highly productive conjunction.

Hosokawa's skill in this respect must owe a good deal to the very specific connections between opposites – Eastern and Western, most basically – in his personal life. Born in Hiroshima in 1955, he moved to Germany to study in the 1970s – but with teachers (Isang Yun and Klaus Huber) who encouraged him to penetrate more deeply into his own Japanese culture and spirituality while at the same time preserving and refining the kind of progressive musical impulses that had led him to the country of Stockhausen and Helmut Lachenmann in the first place. As the first track – 'Vorspiel. Nacht' – of the 'Sounds and Clouds' CD hauntingly reveals, music that is magically alienated from Vivaldi manages to hint at rhythms that become insistent in the Op 10 No 2 Concerto that follows; and at the same time those hoary old clichés about absolute distinctions between Eastern circularity and Western linearity begin to break down. By the end, as Hosokawa's gently lamenting postlude to Vivaldi's last ebullient *Allegro* dies away, you sense a subtlety and refinement that is best described by the music itself, not by critical annotators.

You sense a subtlety and refinement that is best described by the music itself, not by critical annotators

Of course, Hosokawa is by no means the only composer from the Far East to have travelled west in the post-war decades and then sustained a successful career in both hemispheres. His Japanese precursor Tōru Takemitsu (1930-96) is conventionally described as being closer to French and Impressionist sources, while Hosokawa often seems more Germanic, more expressionist in style. *Arc-Song*, a short work for oboe and harp from 1999, represents these qualities at their most forceful; yet even here the slightly softer edges, the openness to lyrical as well as (melo)dramatic modes of expression, with occasional pitches destabilised by microtonal blendings, prevent him from becoming yet another purveyor of chilly avant-gardism. This impassioned expressiveness is no less striking in the best of the recent piano studies from 2011-13, especially No 4 (ECM, 4/17). In a career spanning nearly 40 years, Hosokawa has never shunned the mainstream, and the currently available recordings of his music bear this out, despite the fact that his most substantial compositions, including four operas and a 45-minute monodrama based on Poe's *The Raven* (whose premiere in Brussels Hosokawa himself conducted in 2012), have not so far been released on disc.

By the time the first CD of Hosokawa's music appeared in 1996, 10 years had passed since he had completed his studies in Freiburg, and 14 since his prizewinning orchestral work *Preludio* had been premiered by the Berlin Philharmonic. The first composition listed in his publisher's catalogue – *Melodia II* for piano (1977) – is the work of a 22-year-old who was just beginning to digest the potent influences of his immediate German environment, from the mainstream modernism of Henze, Zimmermann and Aribert Reimann, to the complex, sometimes experimental avant-gardism of Stockhausen, Nono, Lachenmann and Brian Ferneyhough. It would be an oversimplification to suggest that only after



PHOTOGRAPHY: KAZ ISHIKAWA

HOSOKAWA FACTS

Born Hiroshima, October 23, 1955.
Education Between 1976 and 1986 he studied principally with Isang Yun in Berlin and Klaus Huber in Freiburg.
Career Hosokawa has won a range of prestigious prizes, and since 2001 has been a member of the Berlin Academy of Arts. In Japan, he has been music director of the Takefu International Music Festival since 2001 and a guest professor at the Tokyo College of Music since 2004.
Hosokawa on Hosokawa
'Japanese artists have traditionally taken the connection between man and nature as a theme. I feel that they are seeking in art the ultimate dissolution of man into nature and the ecstasy of becoming one with it.'

'I perceive music as plant-like development and growth, and I wish to continue composing music with a different viewpoint from that of European composers, who construct music architecturally...In creating my own music, I wish to base it firmly...on my own musical and cultural roots, and from there to let it blossom internally.'

the full potential of such influences had made itself felt could Hosokawa begin to engage with the Zen-inspired *Geidō* culture represented by his grandfather, a master of ikebana (the art of Japanese flower arrangement). But the special intensity – more meditative than simply manipulative – of ikebana's engagement with the natural world goes to the heart of Hosokawa's musical imagery and style. In the most obvious way, flowers and floral processes – gardens, blooming and blossoming – occur frequently in Hosokawa's titles; and these topics generate a wealth of other images involving both landscapes and seascapes. Motion is another key concept, in contexts such as the cycle of pieces called *Voyage* and the ubiquitous allusions to waves – sound waves, airwaves, the ebb and flow of tides, as in the orchestral *Circulating Ocean* (2005) – in conjunction with an acute awareness of the whole phenomenon of vocal and instrumental resonance.

Hosokawa has described the impact on him, as a teenager, of the electronic music performed during the 1970 Osaka World Fair, and although he has not subsequently been closely involved with electroacoustics, the possibility of bringing the special resonance of harmonic spectra into a world associated with Buddhist spirituality and rituals features frequently in his music. A range of relatively early works for string quartet, mostly written between 1980 and 1998, shows that these associations are of long standing. Only the earliest of these, *Urbilder* ('Primordial Images'), avoids the explicit connection with nature in its title, and the music already projects a meticulous attentiveness to the identities and balancing characteristics of quite small details, a quality Hosokawa sees as calligraphic; the composer's own delicate calligraphy is demonstrated on the cover of the booklet of the Neos disc (below). By 1993 (in *Landscape V*), Hosokawa was combining the reticent, breathy sound of the *shō* with the string quartet, while making clear that the music's starting point was not Japanese; instead, there was an association (that only he could have made) between a Finnish landscape and the painting of Mark Rothko.

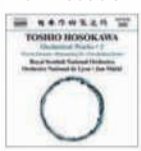
Such intriguingly personal linkages do much to determine the consistent principles embodied in the series of major orchestral works written between 2005 and 2011 included on a pair of Naxos CDs issued in 2014. *Circulating Ocean* is the most overtly traditional in character (it was written to be played by the Vienna Philharmonic at the Salzburg Festival), with hints of rhapsodic harp-writing and mysterious fanfares, but a satisfyingly taut symmetrical design. The single-movement Piano Concerto (2006), with the title *Lotus under the Moonlight (Hommage à Mozart)*, is (for me at least) a rather less persuasive response to an older model – the slow movement of the K488 Piano Concerto – than *Singing Garden in Venice* a few years later (2011). But the remaining four works on these Naxos discs – *Chant* (for cello and orchestra) and *Woven Dreams* (both 2009), the Horn Concerto, *Moment of Blossoming* (2010), and *Blossoming II* for chamber orchestra (2011) – add up to a formidably accomplished conspectus of the enhanced expressive range of Hosokawa's more recent instrumental music, gaining strength as it does from mutually supportive exchanges between 'Western' melancholy and 'Eastern' serenity – exchanges even more intense in the recent piano studies. Hosokawa has confessed that 'we Japanese are always in contradiction', and this means needing to 'forget' all those similarities and differences between European and Asian modes of creative thought of which he is so acutely conscious. The repertoire enshrined on these various CDs is the best possible evidence of his success in turning 'contradiction' into convincing (and characterful) musical art. G

HOSOKAWA ON DISC

A glimpse into the composer's extraordinary musical world



String Quartets
Diotima Quartet, Mayumi Miyata *shô*
Neos
Hosokawa's intensely personal responses to Western classical music's most refined genre remain among his finest achievements. Includes *Urbilder* and *Landscape V*.



Orchestral Works 2
Royal Scottish National Orchestra; Lyon National Orchestra / Jun Märkl
Naxos
The three pieces here – *Circulating Ocean*, *Woven Dreams* and *Blossoming II* – reinforce Hosokawa's commitment to poetic representations of human presences in the natural world.



Sounds & Clouds
Jeremias Schwarzer *rec* Holland Baroque
Channel Classics (12/15)
Avoiding incongruities, promoting subtle interactions, this unlikely alternation of Hosokawa (*Singing Garden in Venice*) and Vivaldi works remarkably well.

Vocal



Edward Seckerson on Jonas Kaufmann's unique take on Mahler:

'The change of timbre that defines the mood of the contrasting songs just isn't there – a whole dimension is missing' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 82



Alexandra Coghlan hails a celebration of St Paul's:

'It's the Victoriana that really stands apart, gilded into soft-focus loveliness by the cathedral acoustic' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 88

JS Bach

St John Passion, BWV245

James Gilchrist *ten* Evangelist **Neal Davies** *bass-bar* Christus **Roderick Williams** *bass* Pilatus **Sophie Bevan** *sop* **Iestyn Davies** *counterten* **Ed Lyon** *ten*
The Choir of King's College, Cambridge; Academy of Ancient Music / Stephen Cleobury
King's College, Cambridge Ⓑ ② KGS0018
(109' • DDD/DSD • T/t)
Recorded live, March 21 & 22, 2016

JS Bach

St John Passion, BWV245

Lothar Odinius *ten* Evangelist **Christian Immler** *bass* Christus **Yorck Felix Speer** *bass* Pilatus **Ditte Andersen, Lenneke Ruiten** *sops* **Delphine Galou** *contr* **David Hansen** *counterten* **Colin Balzer, Valerio Contaldo** *tens*
Les Musiciens du Louvre / Marc Minkowski
Erato Ⓑ ② 9029 58540-5 (111' • DDD • T/t)





Comparisons can be odious but are sometimes inevitable. For donkey's years it has been possible to pick up at a bargain price the excellent recording of the *St John Passion* by Stephen Cleobury's Choir of King's College, Cambridge, and the Brandenburg Consort (first issued on Columns Classics in 1996, it has been reissued cheaply on at least two labels in umpteen different editions since). It remains one of the finest recordings of its type – an all-male church choir with boy trebles, a top-notch period-instrument orchestra and first-class soloists. This new live recording was made 20 years later in the chapel at King's during two concerts.

Cleobury's newest incarnation of the choir is accompanied adroitly by the Academy of Ancient Music, and the largest-scale collective moments are flawless: every strand of detail in 'Herr, unser Herrscher' is delineated impeccably, with the AAM's graceful strings and perfectly balanced oboes giving nuanced support to the choir (the boys' melismatic singing is shaped articulately); there is less sonorous density and dramatic tension than in the 1996 recording but perhaps crisper precision and clarity. *Turba* choruses are paced sagely, chorales are uncomplicated (if perhaps a touch perfunctory) and 'Ruht wohl' has sincere directness. James Gilchrist's compassionate Evangelist, Roderick Williams's animated 'Eilt, ihr angefochtnen Seelen' (with whispered 'Wohin!' interjections from the surefooted choir), Iestyn Davies's sublime 'Es ist vollbracht!' (a poignant dialogue with gambist Liam Byrne) and Sophie Bevan's lithesome 'Zerfliesse, mein Herze' (lovely conversational interplay between the quartet of flutes and oboes da caccia) will be sufficient reasons alone to persuade many of us to pick up a copy.

Marc Minkowski's recording, made around a concert performance in Lyon, takes a radically different approach in just about every respect. He explains in an illuminating interview that he 'sought to gather together eight distinct voices that would form a genuine ensemble and could surmount without apparent effort the technical and expressive difficulties of the arias. All of them have a career in the opera house, but all of them have been singing Bach since childhood: Bach is their first language.' In the event, the eight-strong ensemble is unerringly committed to text in 'Herr, unser Herrscher', which is taken quickly by Minkowski and played vividly by Les Musiciens du Louvre, including the extra thump of the contrabassoon as added by Bach in 1749. Moreover, the rapid narrative from Lothar Odinius's lively if somewhat dry Evangelist and rapid *turba* choruses means that there is seldom a dull moment in the scenes detailing Christ's trial and condemnation (for example, the crowd is frantic in 'Wäre dieser nicht ein Übeltäter', their rushed shouts of 'Kreuzige ihn' sound credibly vengeful and the rolling dice in 'Lasset uns den nicht zerteilen' has seldom been illustrated more clearly by the instrumental bass line). Reflective spirituality and poetic beauty seem to be glossed over in recitatives, although chorales are always blended sweetly.

Minkowski's willingness to ask fresh questions certainly avoids complacency, although the most explosive elements of the performance tend to be stimulating rather than satisfying. Nevertheless, moments of profound beauty include Felix Speer's gentle 'Betrachte, meine Seel' leading into Colin Balzer's softly cathartic 'Erwäge', and the last furlong of the work turns out to be deeply moving: Delphine Galou's heartfelt 'Es ist vollbracht!', Christian Immler's articulate singing in juxtaposition to the underlying chorale in 'Mein teurer Heiland' and the sustained beauty of phrasing in 'Ruht wohl' are all judged beautifully. **David Vickers**

Brahms

Ein deutsches Requiem, Op 45

Hanna-Elisabeth Müller *sop* **Simon Keenlyside** *bar*
Vienna Singverein; The Cleveland Orchestra / Franz Welser-Möst
Video director **Brian Large**
Belvedere Ⓕ BVD08027; Ⓕ BVD08028
(72' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080p • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)
Recorded live at the Stiftsbasilika, St Florian, Austria, August 22 & 23, 2016



There is an ecumenical irony to the appearance of this *German Requiem*, in Reformation anniversary year, from a seat of the Catholic High Baroque – and where Bruckner, of all people, spent hours in service and private devotion. However, it is the quality of humble devotion so germane to the work that distinguishes the sober but never staid conducting of Franz Welser-Möst. Pacing is well-nigh perfect, marginally more spacious than on the feast of All Souls in 2009, when choir and orchestra performed it together in Vienna. Simon Keenlyside was also the baritone soloist on that occasion; at St Florian he



The Choir of King's College, Cambridge, and the Academy of Ancient Music perform Bach's St John Passion with a first-class line-up of soloists

was in sound if somewhat uniform voice, lacking (unlike Hanna-Elisabeth Müller) a spot-mic to focus his part.

Renewed over time and stylistically up to date, adorned (in the soprano and alto sections) with shawls, smiles and the odd nose-stud, the Vienna Singverein is now a far cry from the days of Karajan's loyalty to them beyond the call of duty, though in maintaining pitch and energy through this most unrelenting of repertoire choral works the singers are greatly aided by the flowing tempos and clipped phrasing of the fugues favoured by Welser-Möst. Squeezed into the space before the altar, The Cleveland Orchestra are usefully reduced to almost chamber-orchestra dimensions.

The audio mix spotlights solo winds and harp but also offers enough of the space of St Florian for a harmonious marriage of sound and image. Filming, too, rarely puts a foot wrong. For the great crescendo over 'I place my hope in thee', the picture cuts to the roof of the abbey and pans reverentially down to a Marian painting (the loss of rhythmic control in the second half of the subsequent fugue is a rare glitch). There are no extras, and none are needed. **Peter Quantrill**

PHOTOGRAPHY: BENJAMIN SHEEN/KING'S COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE

Caldara

Motetti a due o tre voci, Op 4, plus organ works by Sweelinck, Tunder and Weckmann
Ingeborg Dalheim, Anna Kellnhofer *sops* **Franz Vitzthum** *counterten* **Jan Van Elsacker** *ten* **Florian Götz** *bar* **United Continuo Ensemble**
Pan Classics Ⓕ PC10362 (59' • DDD • T)



Gerhard Poppe's booklet-notes for this disc paint a picture of Antonio Caldara that is more strictly truthful than enticing – a prolific composer, 'whose oeuvre does not contain any spectacular or revolutionary works, but includes a respectable volume of excellent compositions'. It's a perception borne out by the laborious diligence of the 2012 Tactus recording of the composer's Op 4 motets by the Schola Cantorum S Stefano and Valentino Ermacora, but which comes close to being overthrown by the austere beauty of this new recording by the United Continuo Ensemble.

Backwards-looking, if not actively anachronistic, Op 4 is a delicate collection of motets for two or three voices and continuo accompaniment that would belong more naturally to the 1680s than to the early 18th century. There were tantalising hints of hidden dramatic possibilities from the few included on Fabio Biondi's 2015 'Morte e sepoltura di Christo' (Glossa, 7/15), but, until now, no recording of the complete collection has made that case.

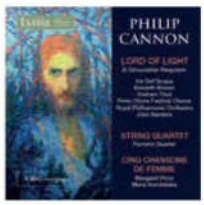
In the deft hands of the United Continuo Ensemble and six excellent vocal soloists, these motets emerge lighter and more agile than in Biondi's vision, less overtly operatic, but dynamic miniatures nonetheless. *Caro mea vere est cibus* is a particularly sensuous duet for two sopranos (Ingeborg Dalheim and Anna Kellnhofer) that throbs with suspension sequences, while *Exaudi Domine* is a more madrigalian affair that adds baritone Florian Götz to the mix, weaving the three voices together with syncopated verve and sway.

The interpolation of Dutch and north German organ works is an odd choice, and the historic organ of Schloss Gottorf provides a rather strident, reedy commentary on the Caldara, while texts are provided only in Latin and German. But these are small quibbles about what is fundamentally a fine disc. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Selected comparison:
Schola Cantorum S Stefano, Ermacora (TACT) TC670303

Cannon

Lord of Light: A Gloucester Requiem[a]. Cinq Chansons de femme[b]. String Quartet[c]
[a]Iris Dell'Acqua, [b]Margaret Price *sops* **[a]Kenneth Bowen** *ten* **[a]Graham Titus** *bass* **[b]Maria Korchinska** *hp* **[c]Parrenin Quartet; [a]Three Choirs Festival Chorus; [a]Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / John Sanders**
Lyrita Itter Broadcast Collection [bc]mono
Ⓕ REAM1132 (70' • ADD)
BBC broadcast performances, [c]July 8, [b]December 15, 1966; [a]January 6, 1981



His passing may have gone largely unnoticed but Philip Cannon (1929-2016) was a highly respected figure still to receive his due, and this disc offers a viable overview of his output. Earliest is *Cinq Chansons de femme* (1952) – settings of old French ballads whose agile vocal line, heard against limpid harp-writing, is eloquently rendered by Margaret Price. Cannon's French ancestry is obliquely evident in his String Quartet (1964), rejected by the Cheltenham Festival and taken up by the Parrenin Quartet, then among the leading new-music ensembles. Its four movements are continuous, the rhetorical urgency at the outset maintained through to an 'infinitely desolate' close that confirms the emotional intensity of this 20-minute whole.

Cannon remains best known for his series of large-scale choral works, of which *Lord of Light* (1980) is possibly the finest. While the *Gloucester Requiem* subtitle suggests a Howells-like lineage, the often stark writing for soloists and chorus, allied to that for an orchestra abundant in untuned percussion and an organ part of baleful import, reinforces the apocalyptic nature of the composer's response. Not everything succeeds (setting some of the solo lines in English, French and German, besides Latin, makes minimal difference in execution), but the sustained impact of this piece as it heads toward its defiant resolution has few equals in the recent past.

Such is the impression made by a first performance that wears its 36 years lightly, thanks to the quality of the broadcast. Several other premieres of Cannon's major works have also been preserved, and hopefully recordings of these can similarly be collected for a follow-up release.

Richard Whitehouse

F Couperin

L'apothéose de Lully[a]. Leçons de Ténèbres[b]
[a]Katherine Watson, [a]Anna Dennis *sops* **[a]Stéphane Degout** *spkr* **Arcangelo / Jonathan Cohen**
Hyperion Ⓕ CDA68093 (71' • DDD • T/t)



Having written recently about Christophe Rousset's recording of Couperin's *L'apothéose de Lully* with Stéphane Degout (Aparté, 12/16), I was surprised to encounter Degout again on Jonathan Cohen's new release, and to discover that the recording predates Rousset's. Both recordings are superb, if in different ways, and allow us to marvel at the adaptability of Couperin's music.

One of the particular delights of Cohen's Arcangelo is the idiomatic continuo-playing of the lutenist Thomas Dunford. From the outset he assumes the dominant role in elaborating the bass, rather than Cohen at the harpsichord. That this was a deliberate artistic decision is borne out by the inner logic of the instrumentation in both works on this disc.

Where Rousset varied the ensemble textures of the *Apothéose* with flutes, oboes and violins in the Lullian manner, Cohen has created a magical, delicate palette of chamber music colours with merely two violins and continuo. In the 'Vol de Mercure' and the 'Enlévement de Lulli au Parnasse', the solo lute accompaniment adds to the sense of moving through air. Jonathan Manson's solo viol accompaniments in the 'Rumeur Souteraine' and 'Plaintes des Mêmes' blend beautifully with the violins. The two Airs in which Lully and Corelli accompany one another transport the listener to Louis XIV's private quarters at Versailles, where the *Apothéose* might well have been performed in the closing days of his reign (and published at a later date).

Although Couperin composed the *Leçons de Ténèbres* for the nuns of Longchamp, they could well have been privately performed at Versailles. Of a planned set of nine, only three made it into print. In this performance the distinction between the melismatic elaborations of the Hebrew letters and the declamatory Latin narrative is signalled by the lute: absent in the Hebrew, eloquent in the Latin. The soprano Katherine Watson gives a stylish, sensitive performance of the first that reflects her earlier work with William Christie; in the second there is evidence that the operatic soprano Anna Dennis is less wedded to the French Baroque repertoire. The two nevertheless give a glowing account of the third. **Julie Anne Sadie**

Feldman

Three Voices
Juliet Fraser *sop*
hat[now]ART Ⓕ HATNOWART198 (52' • DDD • T)



Morton Feldman's 1982 *Three Voices* for female voice accompanied by two pre-recorded tracks relayed through a pair of giant loudspeakers – which symbolise the tombstones of the poet Frank O'Hara and the painter Philip Guston, to whom the work is dedicated – has had a chequered history on disc. Joan La Barbara's problematic premiere recording, on the defunct New Albion label (12/90), is an expensive buy on second-hand Amazon, while Marianne Schuppe's version for Col Legno is compromised by its pinched, dry recorded sound. A performance by three 'live' sopranos (Françoise Kubler, Marie Madeleine Koebelé, Laura Zimmermann) on the Canadian label L'Empreinte Digitale is elegantly executed but, I'd argue, robs the music of its subliminal tension between live performer and dead technology.

The British soprano Juliet Fraser, best known for her work with the vocal ensemble Exaudi, has clearly intuited the lessons of these earlier readings. She moves at a slower pace through Feldman's score – 53 minutes against La Barbara and Schuppe's 49 – a decision, she says, that grounds her performance 'in a workable mean pulse from which I then invited certain passages to deviate gently'. Feldman designed the piece around La Barbara, and her vocal athletics are flawless and impressive, but the brighter tempo and intimate recording generates psychoacoustic 'wobbles' between partials – an alluring but ultimately overwhelming sound.

In Fraser's performance, though, space opens up between your ears and the recorded environment, terrain into which the music unfolds. Feldman's fancy that the pre-recorded material symbolises past lives into which the live performer breathes life is woven into La Barbara's version as the nasal, filtered quality of the tape gets warmed in the moment. Fraser pushes this concept further. Falling parallel chromatic chord sequences put you in mind of close-miked, close-harmony singing (spiced with exquisite nudges against equal temperament) which contrast with a more natural vocal tone elsewhere. As the piece progresses, Feldman begins to feed a Frank O'Hara poem – 'Who'd have thought that



'Absolutely flawless': Cinquecento turn their expert attention to the obscure Viennese composer Jean Guyot

snow falls' – inside melodic patterns that are already spiralling downwards and melting away. A snowblinding mesh of strong beats crossing weaker downbeats keeps the music static yet oddly busy – the delicate tread of Fraser's rhythmic footfall leading you further into the blizzard.
Philip Clark

Guyot

Adorna thalamum. Amen, amen dico vobis. Accepit Jesus panem. Ave Maria...Signum magnum. Noe, noe, genuit puerpera. O florens rosa. Omni tempore benedic Deum. Prudentes virgines. Te Deum laudamus. Te Deum Patrem
Cinquecento with **David Allsopp** *counterten*
Hyperion Ⓕ CDA68180 (64' • DDD • T/t)



The ensemble Cinquecento – resident in Vienna but international in their personnel – have made something of a career by recording obscure 16th-century composers with Viennese associations. But this time the word 'obscure' is an understatement: Jean Guyot was master of music at the Imperial Chapel for less than a year, 1563-64, and his known career was otherwise entirely at Liège. His known output of 27 motets, 16 chansons and a Mass (of which, so far as I can establish, only five chansons are available in modern edition: everything here seems to be newly edited by the singers of Cinquecento) puts him alongside dozens of lesser-known composers of the late 16th century: *Grove* does not even itemise his works; and the only major study of him is a magnificent two-volume monograph published in his home town of Châtelet in 1875 by one Clément Lyon, who styled himself 'ancien officier de l'armée belge'.

But Guyot emerges from this disc as a marvellously fluent composer, perhaps a touch unvaried in texture but always pleasing: only in the *Te Deum* that closes the disc, conceivably one of his last works, does the music actually begin to jump to the ear. The five adult men of Cinquecento – here joined by the countertenor David Allsopp – are, as always, absolutely flawless in the performance of this music. Even by the best standards of today their ensemble, balance and intonation are beyond reproach. David Gostick's lucid and useful booklet-note includes deft characterisations of the motets presented. **David Fallows**

Haydn

The Seasons *(sung in English)*
Carolyn Sampson *sop* **Jeremy Ovenden** *ten* **Andrew Foster-Williams** *bass-bar* **National Forum of Music Choir; Wrocław Baroque Orchestra; Gabrieli Consort & Players / Paul McCreesh**
Signum Ⓜ ② SIGCD480 (133' • DDD • T)



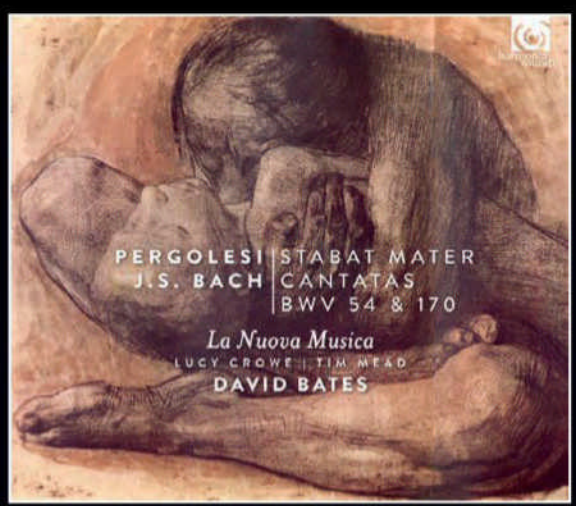
'Haydn is writing with new zeal since he has had the good fortune to lose his nasty wife', noted the Swedish diplomat Fredrick Silverstolpe in May 1800, when the composer was immersed in *The Seasons*. Silverstolpe later remarked that 'the subject is much more limited than that of *The Creation* but closer to the composer's own taste'. Haydn's own words suggest the opposite. He repeatedly protested at the moralising banality of Baron van Swieten's text, freely adapted from James Thomson's pastoral epic, and derided the imitations of insects, cattle and frogs, so delightful to us, as 'Frenchified trash'.

Haydn later claimed that his exertions on *The Seasons* had undermined his health. Yet whatever his feelings on his unloved wife's death, the 'new zeal' reported by



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LA NUOVA MUSICA
DAVID BATES
LUCY CROWE | TIM MEAD



HMM 907589

PERGOLESI | STABAT MATER
J.S. BACH | CANTATAS BWV 54 & 170

From Leipzig to Naples.
Two of Bach's finest cantatas, both for solo alto, composed in Weimar (1714) and Leipzig (1726) respectively, are here coupled with Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* of 1736, the eighteenth century's favourite sacred work. The gap between austere Lutheran piety and searing Mediterranean emotionalism might seem unbridgeable. Yet Bach so admired the composition of his Neapolitan colleague that he made his own 'parody' of it to a German text. On this recording, La Nuova Musica and its two eminent soloists display equal mastery of both idioms.

harmoniamundi.com

Silverstolpe is borne out by the result. Publicly premiered in Vienna's Redoutensaal in May 1801, this most hedonistic of oratorios is at once a life-enhancing celebration of Arcadian harmony and a paean to enlightened deism, culminating in the magnificent certainty of salvation. In the Anglophone world *The Seasons* long lagged behind *The Creation*, hindered by van Swieten's stilted, sometimes ludicrous English translation. On CD, of course, buyers are now spoilt for choice, with a clutch of fine versions, in German, from, inter alios, Gardiner (Archiv), Jacobs, Harnoncourt (both Harmonia Mundi), Herreweghe (PHI) and Colin Davis (LSO Live). If you prefer your *Seasons* in English, the only two recordings hitherto available have been the eccentric – and cut – late-1950s Beecham recording (Somm) and Colin Davis and BBC forces (Philips) from 1968, using a spruced-up version of the Baron's mangled English. For this new Anglo-Polish collaboration, Paul McCreesh has reworked van Swieten's libretto more radically, keeping as close as possible to the German, and making the recitatives, especially, much more idiomatic, all within the spirit of Thomson's original.

What emphatically sets this *Seasons* apart from all previous recordings, whatever the language, is the scale. As on his *Gramophone* Award-winning *Creation* (Archiv, 3/06), McCreesh replicates the forces of the public premiere, pitting a chorus of around 75 against a superb period-instrument orchestra of 100-plus. Although the resonant acoustic of the Wrocław National Music Forum can impede ideal clarity, the big choruses, topped by a shining, un-wobbly soprano line, generate a visceral excitement unmatched by any rivals, not least in the harmonic 'purple patch' that crowns the autumn chorus in praise of toil. 'Strauss's *Zarathustra* eat your heart out', I mused at the blazing climax of the summer sunrise. In the cataclysmic thunderstorm, rasping, minatory brass to the fore, the terrified populace evokes Verdi's 'Dies irae', while the autumn hunt, raucously fuelled by anarchic natural horns, has never sounded more uninhibitedly exuberant. In the wine harvest, with its final tipsy fugue, McCreesh conjures a Burgenland bacchanalia to rival Jacobs – high praise indeed.

More consistently than Jacobs and Gardiner, McCreesh also gives Haydn's gentler and more reflective music plenty of breathing space: say, in the prayer in Spring, 'Heav'n be gracious' (though the concluding fugue is dangerously precipitate), or the tenderly lilting evening chorus that closes Summer. While not necessarily eclipsing their counterparts on rival recordings, the three soloists have ideally weighted voices, combine well in ensemble and relish their opportunities for scene-painting. With his attractive lyric tenor and keen feeling for words, Jeremy Ovenden excels alike in the shrouded introduction to Summer, the hushed, fearful description of the oppressive midday heat and – a highlight – his unusually urgent portrayal of the winter traveller lost in a blizzard (unlike Thomson, van Swieten provides a happy ending). Andrew Foster-Williams, more baritone than bass, makes a genial, firm-voiced Simon, singing his ploughman's song with unforced gusto – impressive agility, too – and bringing a grave eloquence to his valedictory aria in Winter. Carolyn Sampson's vernal tone and grace of phrasing always give pleasure, though her words, unlike the men's, can be hard to decipher. All the soloists make something eagerly characterful of the 'dry' recitatives – operatic fizz, and a twinkle in the eye, rather than oratorio solemnity.

While the best German-language versions (with Jacobs my own favourite) are not displaced, McCreesh and his massed Anglo-Polish forces have given us a *Seasons* that thrillingly catches both the work's bucolic exhilaration and its invocations of the sublime. And for sheer sonic splendour it's in a class of its own. **Richard Wigmore**

Honegger

Le roi David

Christophe Balissat, Athena Poullos *spkrs* **Lucie Chartin** *sop* **Marianne Beate Kielland** *mez* **Thomas Walker** *ten* **Lausanne Vocal Ensemble; Suisse Romande Orchestra / Daniel Reuss**

Mirare Ⓕ MIR318 (72' • DDD • T/t)



These Swiss forces present Honegger's first, 1923 revision of *Le roi David* that maintained the 17-strong instrumental ensemble of the operatic original but introduced spoken dialogue that was intended to quicken the dramatic pace.

Straight away that narration proves this recording's Achilles heel. It is either recorded in a separate studio or produced to sound as such; the effect is akin to constantly switching between a live performance and an isolated studio commentary. Christophe Balissat's monochrome delivery doesn't help, especially when you hear it shunted up against the Prophetess's railing *Sprechgesang* in 'Incantation'.

No real problems with the other vocal contributions. Soprano Lucie Chartin can sound a little pinched up top but is otherwise clean and occasionally radiant; mezzo Marianne Beate Kielland is shapely and supple; but Thomas Walker's declamatory, arresting singing with idiomatic French is best of all.

Honegger's choral writing was designed to accommodate amateurs (despite what the booklet-note says) and the semi-professional Ensemble Vocal de Lausanne do well to sing with open throats and not sound too clipped. There are some vivid moments: the lurching 'Chorus of Philistines'; the organ-like winds at the opening of 'The Dance Before the Ark'; the grain and texture in Honegger's masterly final pages. But for a musical aesthetic that was conceived to cut through with directness, the recessed, smooth feeling to both the recording and the performance are far from ideal and that sterile narration is a deal-breaker. At a lower price, Michel Piquemal on Naxos solves those problems. **Andrew Mellor**

Selected comparison:

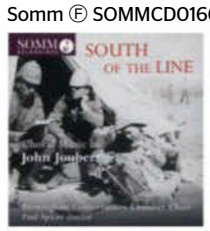
Orch de la Cité, Piquemal (12/99) (NAXO) 8 553649

Joubert

Autumn Rain, Op 105[a]. Be not afeard, Op 179. Incantation. O Lorde, the maker of al thing[b]. O praise God in his holiness, Op 52[b]. Pilgrimage Song. Sonnet, Op 123. South of the Line, Op 109[c]. There is no rose. This is the gate of the Lord, Op 164. Three Portraits, Op 97

[ac]**Domonkos Csabay,** [c]**György Hodzso** *pfs* [b]**Nicholas Wearne** *org* [c]**Matthew Firkins** *timp* [c]**Harry Bent,** [c]**Stephen Plummer,** [c]**Miriam Kitchener,** [c]**George Kirkham** *perc* **Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir / Paul Spicer**

Somm Ⓕ SOMMCD0166 (80' • DDD • T)



Seven first recordings ping out of Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir's celebration of the composer, 90 this year, associated with the city's University. John Joubert is as communicative and direct in his choral works as in his operas, symphonies and concertos but you can easily sense, in these pieces, a man schooled on Anglican choral music (as he was, in both Cape Town and London).

Often that directness is founded on a rhythmic impetus, as in *O praise God in his holiness* and much of *South of the Line*, the headline work here. Sometimes rhythm is just as important but rendered almost

invisible by top-line melodic charm (as in the famous *There is no rose* and *Autumn Rain*). Always, text is the starting point. While some works have a Leighton-like underlying savagery that can bubble up via layering or counterpoint (as in *Pilgrimage Song* and some parts of *Incantation*), more recent works such as *Be not afeard* from 2015 suggest that Joubert has softened at the edges.

South of the Line, after Thomas Hardy's Boer War poetry, can drift into the glib when a distinctly English choral language meets militaristic percussion. But the writing is always full of rigour and, despite the obvious influence of Britten, it could never be parodied. Joubert almost always has a crafty solution in the final bar of a work or movement.

In terms of sound, the confident BCCC are halfway between an undergraduate chapel choir and a conservatoire chamber choir made up of vocal studies students (which they are). The recording could have been better: it renders tenors and basses fuzzy and indistinct (bass tuning can slip and slide, as in the second of the *Three Portraits*) and instead homes in on the very able soprano group; but they can experience 'vibrato disagreement' and curdle at higher volumes and registers. **Andrew Mellor**

Mahler

Das Lied von der Erde
Jonas Kaufmann *ten*
Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Jonathan Nott
Sony Classical Ⓕ 88985 38983-2 (61' • DDD • T/t)



When you are as big a star as Jonas Kaufmann, when your instrument is *fach*-defying and your choices in terms of the repertoire seemingly boundless, you get to do pretty much what you want – including, it seems, reconceiving Mahler's seminal song-symphony for a single voice. It's hard to know who thought this was a good idea, given that it flies in the face of all rational musicality, other than Kaufmann himself (surely not the conductor, Jonathan Nott?). I'm a huge admirer of Kaufmann in his many and varied guises but this is just plain wrong-headed – and to question Mahler, as he does in the booklet-notes, challenging the notion of two voices and even suggesting that one singer might provide a more coherent overarching structure, is not worthy of such an intelligent artist.

But the proof is in the performance and the contraltos and baritones whom Kaufmann hopes will forgive his 'trespassing' will be smiling in the knowledge that Mahler, acting on what he heard in his mind's ear, really did know best and that the contrast in timbre and colour between the voices is crucial to the way in which Mahler's chosen texts impact on each other. The irony, of course, is that Kaufmann is dream casting for the tenor songs, rising terrifically to the heroics and darker hues of the opening song but equally identifying the sparkle and piquancy in 'Von der Jugend' and the contrasting rapture at the heart of 'Der Trunkene im Frühling', where inebriation gives way to dreams of spring. Kaufmann's 'covered' sound is quite gorgeous here.

But because Mahler's voices are also instrumentalists in his orchestral canvas, a tonal sameness prevails as we move from one song to the next. Those stunning shifts between two worlds, so to speak, are eradicated. Regardless of whether or not Kaufmann has the 'baritonal quality' requisite for the songs normally sung by a contralto or baritone, the reality is that he is still a tenor, the colour is tenorial (rather like Domingo moving into the baritone repertoire), and the change of timbre that defines the mood of the contrasting songs just isn't there. This has nothing to do with Kaufmann's sensitivity to text and musical line and everything to do with it being the same singer. There are phrases in these songs where a different kind of resonance is required for low-lying phrases – particularly the brooding invocations of 'Der Abschied', where the line 'I shall wander in the mountains seeking peace for my lonely heart', which Mahler so memorably picks up in the clarinet, always gets to me. How that moment resonates in my favourite performance of the piece from Leonard Bernstein with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (and James King), also with the Vienna Philharmonic; it really is enough to break your heart. Nothing remotely on that level happens here. There's a whole dimension missing; and, with all due respect to Kaufmann, we know what it is.

Diehard fans will, of course, want the disc; those who really care about the piece will not. **Edward Seckerson**

B Orr

The Ballad of Mr & Mrs Discobbolos[a]. Canzona[b]. The Painter's Mistress[a]. Songs of a Childhood[a]. Ten Types of Hospital Visitor[c]
Nicky Spence *ten* with [b]**Jordan Black** *cl* [c]**Nikita Naumov** *db* [a]**Iain Burnside** *pf* [b]members of the **Edinburgh Quartet**
Delphian Ⓕ DCD34175 (73' • DDD • T)



The finely crafted, urgently communicative music of Glasgow-born Buxton Orr (1924-97) has not yet received due recognition, so all praise to Delphian for this invaluable collection of solo vocal works. The contents span nearly 25 years, the earliest being *Songs of a Childhood*, six marvellous settings of Scots-language poems commissioned by the Saltire Society and premiered at the 1962 Edinburgh Festival (that radiantly diatonic, folk-song melody in No 5, 'Shy Geordie', to words by the suffragette Helen Cruickshank, truly melts the heart).

Orr quickly followed it up with *Canzona*, a consistently invigorating and deeply thoughtful 22-minute cycle for tenor, clarinet and string trio embracing Scots texts across three centuries either written or collected by figures as diverse as the minstrel Blind Harry, William Dunbar, King James I, Robert Burns and John Skinner. It's framed by memorable treatments (from 1974 and 1970 respectively) of James Elroy Flecker's 'The Painter's Mistress' and Edward Lear's 'The Ballad of Mr & Mrs Discobbolos', the latter's piano part adapted from the guitar original designed for the co-dedicatee, John Williams. That just leaves *Ten Types of Hospital Visitor* (1986), wryly humorous vignettes to words by the Cornish poet (and the composer's good friend) Charles Causley (1917-2003). Here the vocalist is joined by a double bass, Orr's idiomatic and inventive writing for which reflects the close association he enjoyed with his pupil and virtuoso exponent of that instrument, Barry Guy.

Performances are first-rate. Tenor Nicky Spence sings with unstinting eloquence and receives characteristically immaculate support from Iain Burnside. The other instrumental contributions are also of the highest quality (with Nikita Naumov, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra's principal double bass, especially impressive in *Ten Types of Hospital Visitor*). Superbly realistic sound and balance, too, emanating from the studio at Crear in Argyll. Everyone involved with this rewarding release can be very proud of their efforts. **Andrew Achenbach**

Saint-Saëns

'Mélodies avec orchestre'
Mélodies persanes, Op 26[b] – No 1, La brise; No 2, La splendeur vide; No 5, Au cimitière. Aimons-nous[a]. Angélus[a]. L'attente[a]. La cloche[a].



'Unstinting eloquence': Nicky Spence and Iain Burnside recording songs by the Scottish composer Buxton Orr at Crear Studios, Argyll

Les cloches de la mer[b]. Danse macabre[b]. Désir d'amour[b]. L'enlèvement[a]. Extase[b]. La feuille de peuplier[a]. Les fées[b]. Papillons[a]. Le pas d'armes du Roi Jean[b]. Plainte[a]. Rêverie[a]. Souvenances[a]
[a]**Yann Beuron** *ten* [b]**Tassis Christoyannis** *bar*
Svizzera Italiana Orchestra / Markus Poschner
Alpha Ⓕ ALPHA273 (58' • DDD • T/t)



Though issued by Alpha, this disc effectively complements Aparté's recent survey of Saint-Saëns's song collections with piano (3/17). *Mélodies persanes*, albeit abridged in its orchestral version, is common to both, as is the baritone Tassis Christoyannis, sharing the material, in this instance, with the tenor Yann Beuron. David Patrick Stearns's comments in reviewing the Aparté disc, both on Saint-Saëns's achievement as a song composer and on Christoyannis's importance as an artist, hold true here, though the new CD also serves as a reminder of just how fine Beuron can be in this repertory.

Saint-Saëns orchestrated 23 of his songs, remaining fastidiously true, it would seem, to his dictum that the poem should be displayed in a musical context in the way a jeweller uses a setting to show off a precious stone. Nothing is allowed to get in the way of the words. Strings often support the vocal line alone, while woodwind, brass and harp supply splashes of colour that speak volumes. 'Extase', in which the voice hovers in suggestive rapture over slowly shifting chords and arpeggios, is a notably beautiful example.

Saint-Saëns also clearly associated voice types and ranges with particular moods and emotions: the tenor is an elegant, if at times witty dreamer; the baritone is more worldly, active, sexual and anguished. Beuron, who has a remarkable ability to sustain soft high notes without sliding into falsetto, is impeccably stylish throughout, whether turning towards mystic contemplation in 'Angélus' or fantasising excitedly about his lover in 'L'enlèvement'. Christoyannis sings 'Extase' and *Mélodies persanes* with a velvety sensuality, and brings the blackest of humour to 'Danse macabre' (the song pre-dates the symphonic poem) and a fearsome intensity to 'Les cloches de la mer', the darkest, most disquieting of the songs included here, and one for which Saint-Saëns, strikingly, provided his own text. Conducting and playing are faultless. It's a very fine disc indeed. **Tim Ashley**

Schubert

Winterreise, D911
Matthias Goerne *bar* **Markus Hinterhäuser** *pf*
Visualised by **William Kentridge**
Video director **Christian Leblé**
C Major Entertainment Ⓕ DVD 738008; Ⓕ Blu-ray 738104 (85' + 53' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo • 0 • s)
Recorded live at the Aix-en-Provence Festival, July 8 & 15, 2014
Extra feature: Documentary, 'A Trio for Schubert'



The first question, of course, is whether or not *Winterreise* really needs anything to accompany it, especially when it is performed with such compelling quiet intensity as it is here by Matthias Goerne and Markus Hinterhäuser. But it's a question that William Kentridge is naturally very aware of himself, and which he touches on several times in the generous and fascinating documentary that accompanies this release of his 'visualisation' of Schubert's song-cycle.

In fact, I'd recommend watching that documentary first, since it makes clear what this version of the work *isn't* trying to be:

ALESSANDRIA	Michele Pittaluga International Guitar and Composition for Classical Guitar Competitions "Premio Città di Alessandria"
AUCKLAND	Michael Hill International Violin Competition
AUGSBURG	International Violin Competition Leopold Mozart
BANFF	Banff International String Quartet Competition
BARCELONA	«Maria Canals International Music Competition»
BEIJING	Beijing International Music Competition
BELGRADE	International Jeunesses Musicales Competition
BERLIN	International Max Rostal Competition
BERLIN	«Grand Prix Emanuel Feurmann» International Cello Competition
BESANÇON	Concours International de Jeunes Chefs d'Orchestre
BILBAO	Concours International de Chant de Bilbao-Bizkaia «Pedro Mª Unaue»
BOLZANO	Ferruccio Busoni International Piano Competition
BONN	International Telekom Beethoven Competition
BORDEAUX	Concours International de Quatuor à Cordes de Bordeaux
BRATISLAVA	J.N. Hummel International Piano Competition
BRESCIA	International Violin Competition "Città di Brescia"
BRUXELLES ///	Concours Musical International Reine Elisabeth de Belgique
BUCHAREST	George Enescu International Competition
BUCHAREST	Le Grand Prix d'Opera International Singing Competition
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BYDGOSZCZ	Paderewski International Piano Competition
CALGARY	Honens International Piano Competition
CHARTRES	Concours International d'Orgue «Grand Prix de Chartres»
CLEVELAND	Cleveland International Piano Competition
COLOGNE	International Music Competitions Cologne
DORTMUND	International Schubert Competition
DUBLIN	Dublin International Piano Competition
DUBLIN	Veronica Dunne International Singing Competition
DÜSSELDORF	"Aeolus" International Competition for Wind Instruments
EINDHOVEN	Tromp International Percussion Competition
EPINAL	Concours International de Piano d'Epinal
FORT WORTH	Van Cliburn International Piano Competition
GENEVA ///	Concours de Genève
GENOVA ///	International Violin Competition "Premio Paganini"
GLASGOW	Scottish International Piano Competition
GRAZ	International Competition "Franz Schubert and Modern Music"
HACHIOJI	Gaspar Cassado International Violoncello Competition
HAMAMATSU	Hamamatsu International Piano Competition
HAMAMATSU	Mt. Fuji International Opera Competition of Shizuoka
HANNOVER	Joseph Joachim International Violin Competition
HELSINKI	Mirjam Helin International Singing Competition
HELSINKI	Helsinki International Maj Lind Piano Competition
HELSINKI	Jean Sibelius International Violin Competition
'S-HERTOGENBOSCH	International Vocal Competition 's-Hertogenbosch
HONG KONG	Hong Kong International Piano Competition
INDIANAPOLIS	International Violin Competition of Indianapolis
JAÉN	International Piano Competition "Premio Jaén"
JEJU	Jeju International Brass Competition
KARUIZAWA	International Oboe Competition of Japan
KATOWICE	Grzegorz Fitelberg International Competition for Conductors
KATRINEHOLM	Swedish International Duo Competition
KIEV	International Competition for Young Pianists in memory of Vladimir Horowitz
KOBE	Kobe International Flute Competition
LEEDS	Leeds International Piano Competition
LEIPZIG	International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition
LICHTENBERG	Henri Marteau International Violin Competition
LUDWIGSLUST	Johann Matthias Sperger International Double Bass Competition
LUXEMBOURG	Concours International de Percussion
LYON	Concours International de Musique de Chambre-Lyon
MANCHESTER	James Mottram International Piano Competition
MARKNEUKIRCHEN	International Instrumental Competition
MELBOURNE	Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition
MIAMI	Murray Dranoff International Two Piano Competition
MONTRÉAL	Canadian International Organ Competition
MONTRÉAL	Concours Musical International de Montréal
MONZA	International Piano Competition Rina Sala Gallo
MOSCOW	International Tchaikovsky Competition
MUNICH ///	ARD International Music Competition
NINGBO	China International Vocal Competition
NORRKÖPING	Wilhelm Stenhammar International Music Competition
ODENSE	Carl Nielsen International Music Competition
ORLÉANS	Concours International de Piano d'Orléans
OSAKA	Osaka International Chamber Music Competition
OSLO	The Queen Sonja International Music Competition
PARIS ///	Concours Long-Thibaud
PARMA	"Fondazione Arturo Toscanini" International Music Competitions
PINEROLO	International Chamber Music Competition "Città di Pinerolo"
PORCIA	Concours International "Città di Porcia"
POZNAN ///	Henryk Wieniawski International Violin Competition
PRAGUE ///	Prague Spring International Music Competition
PRETORIA	Unisa International Music Competitions
QINGDAO	China International Violin Competition
REGGIO EMILIA	International String Quartet Competition "Premio Paolo Borciani"
RIO DE JANEIRO	BNDES International Piano Competition of Rio de Janeiro
ST. MAURICE	Concours International pour Orgue Saint-Maurice d'Agaune
ST. PETERSBURG	Elena Obraztsova International Competition Of Young Opera Singers
SALZBURG	International Mozart Competition
SANTANDER	Paloma O'Shea Santander International Piano Competition
SENDAI	Sendai International Music Competition
SEOUL	Seoul International Music Competition
SHENZHEN	China Shenzhen International Piano Competition
SION	Concours International de Violon «Tibor Varga» Sion Valais
SYDNEY	Sydney International Piano Competition of Australia
TAKAMATSU	The Takamatsu International Piano Competition
TBILISI	Tbilisi International Piano Competition
TEL AVIV	The Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition
TERNI	Concours International de Piano "Alessandro Casagrande"
THESSALONIKI	"Giorgos Thymis" International Piano Competition
TOKYO	International Conducting Competition
TOKYO	International Organ Competition Musashino-Tokyo
TONGYEONG	Isang Yun International Music Competition
TOULOUSE	Concours International de Chant de la Ville de Toulouse
TROMSØ	Top of the World International Piano Competition
TRONDHEIM	Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition
UTRECHT	International Franz Liszt Piano Competition
VALENCIA	Concours International de Piano «José Iturbi»
VERCELLI ///	Concours International de Musique Gian Battista Viotti
VEVEY	Concours International de Piano Clara Haskil
VIENNA	International Beethoven Piano Competition Vienna
VIENNA	Fritz Kreisler International Violin Competition
VILNIUS	International M.K. Ciurlionis Piano and Organ Competition
VIÑA DEL MAR	International Musical Competition Dr. Luis Sigall
WARSAW ///	International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition
WARSAW	Witold Lutoslawski International Cello Competition
WEIMAR	Weimar International Music Competitions
XIAMEN	China International Piano Competition
YEREVAN	Aram Kachaturian International Competition
ZAGREB	Vaclav Huml International Violin Competition
ZÜRICH	Géza Anda International Piano Competition
ZWICKAU	International Robert Schumann Contest for Pianists and Singers

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it's not at staging, per se; Goerne doesn't become a character in a newly envisaged drama; the projections that jostle around on the wall behind him are not reactions to anything specific in the text. In fact, Kentridge explains that the project largely uses material that he had produced in the previous 25 years but which was lying around unused.

Once as a viewer you're unburdened of the quite natural desire to join the dots, to make connections between what you're hearing and seeing, then it's possible to enter the strange, beguiling and very personal world that the artist is creating. Goerne describes it as Kentridge's journey, existing parallel to Schubert's, with scattered references to what feels like a putative personal narrative, as well as to broader issues of South African history. The figure of the artist himself wandering against the turning pages of a book is one of several recurring visual leitmotifs.

Kentridge's contributions are deeply serious, and often beautiful, but one rarely feels that the film (or any film), sensitively directed though it is, is really able to capture the event as a whole. As also happens with some of Kentridge's opera stagings on video, the camera just never quite knows where to look. Here we focus sometimes on Goerne or Hinterhäuser, sometimes on the projections. Sometimes the camera tries to embrace it all, but it's difficult not to feel as though one's constantly missing out on something.

It's fascinating viewing, by turns enchanting and disquieting, but you might, as I did, find your eye simply being drawn back to Goerne. He sings the cycle now with a new and powerful tragic gravity, matched every weary trudge of the way by Hinterhäuser's intelligent and supportive playing. **Hugo Shirley**

'Azahar'

Alfonso X El Sabio Cantigas de Santa Maria – No 10, Rósa das rósas e fror das frores; No 76, Quenas sas figuras da Virgen partir; No 100, Santa María, strela do día (two versions); No 212, Tod. aquel que pola Virgen; No 256, Quen na Virgen groriosa **Machaut** Messe de Nostre Dame **Ohana** Cantigas **Stravinsky** Mass
La Tempête / Simon-Pierre Bestion
Alpha Ⓕ ALPHA261 (82' • DDD • T/t)



The premise of this intriguing project makes a certain intuitive sense. Stravinsky's Mass was composed as a response to Machaut's, so why not present them side by side? The notion is especially attractive because it prompts creative decisions of which performers nowadays might otherwise fight shy. Hence, some of the instruments used in the rest of the programme are pressed into service in Machaut's polyphony; or again, since Stravinsky uses both choir and soloists, certain movements of Machaut are given to the former, others to the latter. On their own, these changes of plumage might seem wilful or fussy (Machaut's *Sanctus* is performed, 'Anonymous 4-style', by female voices only), but here everything integrates within a larger programme that has its own logic. Stravinsky is cross-contaminated as well, in that La Tempête perform it with period instruments. In the mid-range the texture lacks a little clarity, but that seems a small price to pay for gamier timbres and a fruitfully off-centre acoustic experience. Both works already have a healthy discography – enough to satisfy the purists – so why not try something different?

Speaking of 'gamy', another basic performance decision has to do with vocal timbre: La Tempête cultivate the 'orientalist' style of singing in Machaut (its director, Simon-Pierre Bestion, namechecks Marcel Pérès in the accompanying interview). This exoticist approach links up nicely with the programme's second pairing, where arrangements of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* dialogue with French composer Maurice Ohana's settings of the same texts. The two pairs cross-contaminate yet again through at times striking similarities between Ohana and Stravinsky. To my mind the comparison doesn't consistently work in Ohana's favour (a shame, for his was a very sympathetic creative vision), but again the whole programme is very much more than the sum of its parts. I suspect, incidentally, that it was devised with live performance in mind rather than the studio, for the Machaut is shorn of its *Sanctus*; still, it's a small price to pay for imaginative creative licence. The performances are solid and characterful. **Fabrice Fitch**

'Da pacem'

'Echo der Reformation'
Altenburg Intrada XII über 'Ein feste Burg'
G Gabrieli Dulcis Jesu patris imago. Magnificat
Gregorianik Da pacem Domine
Hessen Tromba hollandica
Kerle Missa Da pacem Domine – Agnus Dei
Lassus Da pacem Domine
Luther/Walter Verleih uns Frieden gnädiglich
Marenzio Jubilate Deo **Monteverdi** Selva morale e spirituale – Salve regina
Parabosco Da pacem **Praetorius** Meine Seele erhebt den Herren **Schütz** Gib unsern Fürsten, SWV373. O süsser, o freundlicher, SWV285. Verleih und Frieden, SWR372 **Vecchi** Cibavit nos
RIAS Chamber Choir; Capella de la Torre / Florian Helgath
Deutsche Harmonia Mundi Ⓕ 88985 40541-2 (70' • DDD • T/t)



Five hundred years ago Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, changing the course of Christianity for ever. It's an anniversary that has – thus far – yielded surprisingly few musical responses, making this thoughtful project from the RIAS Kammerchor and Capella de la Torre all the more welcome.

The disc's concept is a simple one: the Reformation may have divided Europe down denominational lines but artistically no such divisions existed. Composers served Catholic and Protestant liturgies with the same musical gestures and textures, united by a shared desire for peace. And so we get Monteverdi and Marenzio alongside Praetorius and Schütz in a musical bird's-eye view of 16th- and 17th-century Europe.

Protestantism is represented in the delicate, text-driven counterpoint of Schütz's *Gib unsern Fürsten*, sung here with filmy clarity by the RIAS Kammerchor, and Michael Altenberg's graceful instrumental Intrada based on Luther's *Ein feste Burg* chorale. The latter is a rare work for strings on a disc otherwise dominated by the buzzing, fizzing wind textures of Katharina Bäuml's superb Capella de la Torre, heard at their best in Orazio Vecchi's *Cibavit nos*.

Catholicism reaches a musical climax in Giovanni Gabrieli's 14-voice *Magnificat* – rich in rhetorical clarity and sonic breadth in this performance – but Protestantism has a musical comeback in the intricate textural interest of Praetorius's own setting, *Meine Seele erhebet den Herren*, giving the lie to any suggestion of musical severity or asceticism.

Polychoral polyphony is all very well but it's the simplest material that is the true measure of this recording. Martin Luther and Johann Walter's *Verleih uns Frieden gnädiglich* is a unison chant, delivered here with such unaffected simplicity and instinctive flow – the heart of a programme that celebrates a lived musical culture as much as a historical anniversary. **Alexandra Coghlan**

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ELIZABETH KENNY

Theatre of the Ayre reveals some of the most extraordinary music of the 17th century on *The Masque of Moments*, its debut recording for Linn. Focusing on the ayre, the central part of a masque, it offers a fascinating glimpse of the audacious and experimental virtuosity that is often absent from our image of English music of this time highlighting the glories of little-known vocal music from the Jacobean and Caroline masque.

NEW RELEASE



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THE OBSERVER

WILLIAM CARTER

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'What most strikes you about William Carter is the sheer force of his musical imagination.'

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STEPHEN HOUGH

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MARIN

a visual fantasy for the symphonic poem by Axel Borup-Jørgensen

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Marin is one of the most important symphonic works in Danish music from last half of the 20th century, and the animation is a new way of experiencing contemporary music.

Re-recording by Danish National Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Thomas Søndergård, in DR Concert Hall, produced by Preben Iwan and Mikkel Nymand. The recording is made in DXD format. (352.8kHz/32 bit).

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Christophe Rousset directs Monteverdi's *Zefiro Torna!*

‘Finland’

Linkola Mieliteko **Rautavaara** Canción de nuestro tiempo. Canticum Mariae virginis. Orpheus singt **Saariaho** Nuits, adieux **Sibelius** Finlandia Hymn, Op 26 No 7. Rakastava **Talvitie** Kuun Kirje
SWR Vocal Ensemble / Marcus Creed
SWR Classic Ⓕ SWR19031CD (72’ • DDD • T)



The SWR Vocal Ensemble’s series of country-themed discs continues but now without Hänssler Classic; this latest disc is on SWR’s own label, which won’t win any awards for design.

Particularly not in Finland, where we find ourselves here. Finns might also struggle to decipher some of the texts in the hands of this renowned radio choir. We don’t hear full enunciation of the vowels in Sibelius’s *Rakastava* or in the (mistitled) *Finlandia Hymn* (the first syllables of ‘koittaa’, ‘soittaa’ and ‘voittaa’ don’t curl round the diphthong as they should).

That’s it for the Sibelius – though there are plenty more rarely heard *a cappella* works that could have been slipped in – while more than 30 minutes of the rest of the disc is hogged by the late Einojuhani Rautavaara, which seems another wasted opportunity given how many high-quality works of *a cappella* music have come out of Finland over the past century. Perhaps the ensemble felt duty-bound to include Rautavaara’s *Orpheus singt*, as they commissioned it.

That piece is sung with the exceptional combination of clarity and weight that marks out this ensemble, while Rautavaara’s *Canticum Mariae virginis* underlines their tuning prowess and agility. Likewise *Canción de nuestro tiempo*. But despite the delicacy of texture in that piece’s third and fourth movements, there’s something else in the sound picture that sounds like low-pitched humming and grunting from Marcus Creed.

Saariaho’s *Nuits, adieux* is slightly weightier and more restrained here than on the highly colourful recent recording from the Norwegian Soloists Choir but the SWR singers show real personality in Jukka Linkola’s *Mieliteko*. I’m just not sure I can make head or tale of Linkola’s hotchpotch piece. From programming to performance to product, I expect better from this brilliant ensemble.

Andrew Mellor

Saariaho – selected comparison:
Norwegian Sols Ch, Pedersen (12/16) (BIS) BIS2139

‘Gods & Monsters’

Beethoven Aus Goethes Faust, Op 75 No 3 **Brahms** Es war ein Markgraf überm Rhein, WoO33 No 29. Sandmännchen, WoO31 No 4 **Mahler** Des Knaben Wunderhorn – Rheinlegendchen; Wo die schönen Trompeten blasen **Mendelssohn** Hexenlied, Op 8 No 8 **Schubert** An die Leier, D737. Atys, D585. Ganymed, D544. Der Musensohn, D764. Der Sänger, D149. Der Zwerg, D771 **Schumann** Der Sandmann, Op 79 No 13. Waldesgespräch, Op 39 No 3 **Wolf** Goethe-Lieder – No 11, Der Rattenfänger. Mörike-Lieder – No 16, Elfenlied; No 44, Der Feuerreiter; No 48, Storchenbotschaft
Nicholas Phan *ten* **Myra Huang** *pf*
Avie Ⓕ AV2368 (64’ • DDD • T/t)



Previous releases from the American tenor Nicholas Phan include a couple of Britten discs, both well reviewed in these pages (4/12 and 12/12). His new album, however, takes us right into the heart of German Romanticism. Phan writes his own booklet-note, in which he talks of presenting Lieder to young schoolchildren in the US, of their openness to the stories that the songs contain. And throughout the disc, whose programme is subdivided into four sections and a postlude, his narrative prowess, care with words and desire to bring these stories to life immediately draw you in.

The voice is light, with a slight Schreier-like tang to it and a seductive *pianissimo*. It is heard at its best in the gentler numbers: he sounds delightfully fresh in the five songs (including ‘Rheinlegendchen’ and ‘Der Sänger’) that make up the ‘Knights and Kings’ section. This freshness of approach is matched throughout by the terrific playing of Myra Huang – listen to the bounce she brings to the introduction of ‘Ganymed’ or the brilliant sparkle of Beethoven’s ‘Song of the Flea’.

Where the recital is a little less successful is in those numbers that take Phan to the extremes or call for a bit more depth of tone and variety of colour. He’s stretched – as, admittedly, are many – by ‘Waldesgespräch’ and, especially, ‘Der Rattenfänger’. His ‘Wo die schönen Trompeten blasen’ is touching but doesn’t quite manage to convert sadness into tragedy, while ‘Der Zwerg’ (kicking off ‘Things That Go Bump in the Night’) fails for me to build up enough cumulative weight, despite telling its story incisively.

Taken as a whole, though, this is an appealing, charming and clearly lovingly planned recital, engagingly performed. Avie’s recording is resonant but rich and direct. **Hugo Shirley**

‘Heroines of Love and Loss’

‘Female Composers and Classical Heroines of the 17th Century’
Anonymous O death, rock me asleep. The Willow Song **J Bennet** Venus’ birds whose mournful tunes **F Caccini** Lasciatemi qui solo **Kapsberger** Toccata arpeggiata **Piccinini** Ciaccona in partite variate **Purcell** Bonduca – Oh! lead me to some peaceful gloom. Dido and Aeneas – Dido’s Lament **Sessa** Occhi io vissi di voi **Strozzi** L’Eraclito amoroso, Op 2 No 14. Lamento: Lagrime mie **Vivaldi** Cello Sonata, RV42 **Vizzana** O magnum mysterium
Ruby Hughes *sop* **Mime Yamahiro Brinkmann** *vc* **Jonas Nordberg** *theorbo/lute/archlute*
BIS Ⓕ BIS2248 (71’ • DDD/DSD • T/t)



Ruby Hughes is a young soprano who won both first prize and the audience prize at the London Handel competition in 2009; for two years from 2011 she was a BBC New Generation artist. She has a warm, almost mellow voice, well suited to this enterprising selection of 17th-century songs. An overdose of melancholy is averted by the inclusion of instrumental pieces, including the movements of a Vivaldi cello sonata interspersed with the vocal items.

In fact it is with a piece for solo theorbo that the disc opens. Jonas Nordberg brings a touch of rubato to the Kapsberger Toccata that finds a counterpart in Mime Yamahiro Brinkmann’s expressive way with the Sarabanda of the Vivaldi. The second number is the air from *Bonduca*, where Purcell amusingly writes a vocal fanfare at ‘where the shrill trumpets never sound’. The pitch chosen for the recital, about a tone lower than today’s standard, seems to make Dido’s Lament especially poignant.

But the striking feature of the disc is the array of powerful pieces by Italian women composers. Barbara Strozzi’s *L’Eraclito amoroso* is a scena: the opening recitative is followed by four stanzas over a minor-key descending ground bass. Her *Lagrime mie* is similarly dramatic, incorporating recitative and arioso. Yet another lament, *Lasciatemi qui solo* by Francesca Caccini, daughter of Giulio, elicits subtly responsive playing from Nordberg’s theorbo. The sacred pieces by Claudia Sessa and Lucrezia Vizzana

are not quite so memorable; but to all of them Ruby Hughes brings an exemplary understanding and stylishness. In the anonymous last piece, the words attributed to Anne Boleyn, cello and lute imitate a tolling bell: marvellous!

Richard Lawrence

'Jubilate'

Byrd Prevent us, O Lord **HB Gardiner** Evening Hymn (Te lucis ante terminum) **Goodall** The Lord is my shepherd **Greene** Lord, let me know mine end **Handel** Zadok the Priest, HWV258 **Ireland** Greater love hath no man **Mealor** Ubi caritas **Mendelssohn** Hear my prayer, WoO15. Veni Domine, Op 39 No 1 **Parry** I was glad **Purcell** O God, thou art my God, Z35 **Rutter** A Gaelic Blessing[a]. The Lord bless you and keep you **Stanford** Justorum animae, Op 38 No 1 **Tallis** Salvator mundi **Vaughan Williams** O taste and see **Walton** Jubilate Deo **Weelkes** Hosanna to the Son of David

[a]**Aled Jones** *bar* **St Paul's Cathedral Choir; Cathedral Choristers of Britain / Andrew Carwood**

Decca Ⓕ 483 1531DH (76' • DDD)



Britain's tradition of cathedral music-making is one of its greatest cultural legacies. This new recording from Andrew Carwood and St Paul's Cathedral Choir celebrates that legacy while also taking steps, both practical and symbolic, to ensure its future.

Released in support of the newly created Diamond Fund – a charity founded to support choristers and chorister-training – the disc offers the full Anglican chorister experience in microcosm. All the cathedral classics are here, from Tallis to Rutter, with plenty of Stanford, Handel, Walton and Mendelssohn sandwiched in between. It's an evocative repertoire list, and one with plenty of opportunities for the cathedral's superb trebles to shine, both collectively and as soloists.

Perhaps inevitably in St Paul's, it's the Victoriana that really stands apart, gilded and filtered into soft-focus loveliness by the cathedral acoustic. The cadences of Stanford's *Justorum* hang gauzily in the air, while Balfour Gardner's *Evening Hymn* surges thickly, gleaming rich as stained glass.

The space also works its magic on the cluster chords of Mealor's *Ubi caritas* – one of a select handful of modern classics that also includes Goodall's *The Lord is my shepherd* and Rutter's *Gaelic Blessing* (a second, souped-up version of which with Aled Jones is a major misstep).Treble Nathaniel Morley leads both the Goodall and Mendelssohn's *O for the wings of a dove* with wonderful ease and musicality – just one of a selection of excellent soloists. Both Tallis's *Salvator mundi* and Weelkes's *Hosanna to the Son of David* however feel rather clotted, their counterpoint sticky and slow in this space.

For four tracks (including *Zadok* and *I was glad*) the St Paul's Choir are joined by 50 choristers from across the UK, representing cathedrals from Aberdeen to York Minster. It's a glorious, precise sound – awesome in the truest sense – and a wonderful opportunity to showcase the girl choristers who have recently joined their male counterparts. It's a shame that neither this trend, nor the arrival of grown women into the back stalls, gets much of a mention in booklet-notes and album art still wedded to the idea of small boys in ruffs. **Alexandra Coghlan**

'Lucrezia Borgia's Daughter'

'Princess, Nun and Musician: Motets from a 16th Century Convent'

attrib **d'Este** Musica quinque vocum motteta materna lingua vocata

Musica Secreta; Celestial Sirens / Laurie Stras, Deborah Roberts

Obsidian Ⓕ CD717 (72' • DDD • T/t)



This surprisingly impassioned selection of anonymous motets from a Venetian publication *Musica quinque vocum motteta materna lingua vocata* (1543) has been carefully researched by Professor Laurie Stras of Southampton University. She believes them to be the earliest published polyphony for nuns, and their origin to be the convent of Corpus Domini in Ferrara, home of Suor Leonora d'Este (1515-75), Lucrezia Borgia's daughter.

The progressive nature of these motets will surprise and delight lovers of 16th-century music. Written for equal voices, they are contained within a two-octave compass promoting a rich, sonorous texture. Such textures are beautiful and supple in the hands of Musica Secreta, whose singers include leading voices of Renaissance music: Deborah Roberts, Sally Dunkley and Caroline Trevor. They are cushioned by the warm embrace of an organ and underpinned with a sinewy viol to provide a firm polyphonic meld.

The Easter Day motet, *Hec dies quam fecit Dominus*, is the most exciting piece on this disc: musically, because it is emblazoned with rapturous harmonic twists; and in performance because of its joyful exuberance of overlapping alleluias, where closely clustered points of imitation peal like church bells. Yet this narrow vocal compass doesn't always dominate: there are, for instance, wonderfully delicate, almost fragile, soaring soprano lines in the miniature setting of *Sicut lilium inter spinas*. In the Magnificat antiphon *Veni sponsa Christi*, Musica Secreta are joined by the choir Celestial Sirens, who provide pleasing choral depth. However, in *Felix namque es* [*sacra virgo Maria*] this choral treatment highlights sibilant clusters that lead to rather scurrilous phrasing.

In short, these unexpectedly sensual motets form an immaculate collection of convent music that is both unrelentingly beautiful and fully captivating throughout.

Edward Breen

'Queen Mary's Big Belly'

'Hope for an Heir in Catholic England'

Anonymous New Ballad of the Marigold **Lassus** Te spectant, Reginalde, Poli **Mundy** Exsurge Christe **A Newman** Fansye **Sheppard** Christi virgo dilectissima. Deus misereatur. Libera nos. Martyr Dei qui unicum. Vain, all our life – I; II **Tallis** Like as the doleful dove. Loquebantur variis linguis. O sacrum convivium. Quod chorus vatum. Sarum Litany. When shall my sorrowful sighing slack **Tye** Peccavimus cum patribus **Wilder** Pater noster
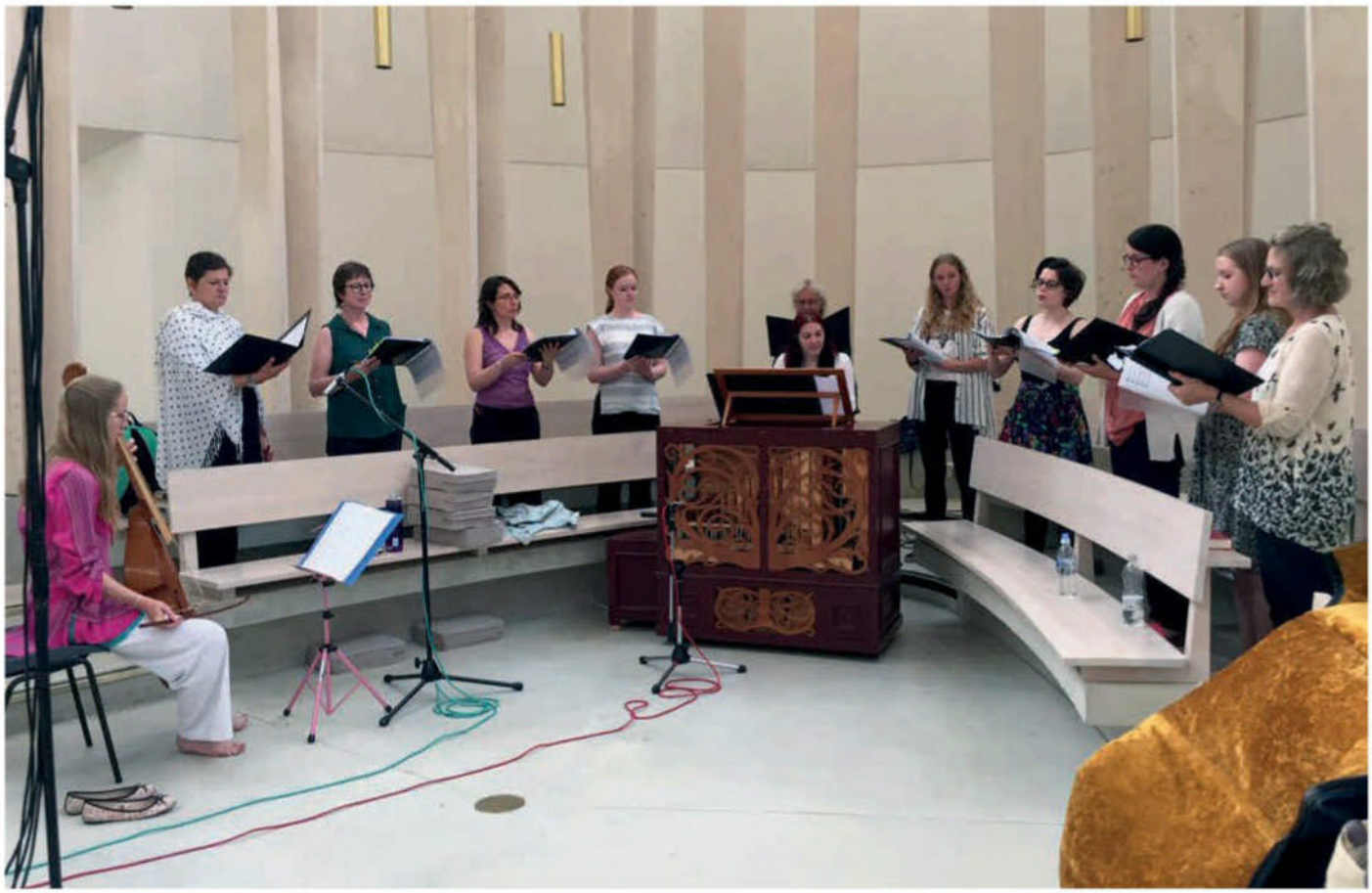
Gallicantus / Gabriel Crouch with **Elizabeth Kenny** *lute*

Signum Ⓕ SIGCD464 (78' • DDD • T/t)



It's an emotive concept – a queen pregnant with the hope of a nation, only to have it shrink away to nothing. Mary I's phantom pregnancy of 1555 provides the evocative subject for all-male ensemble Gallicantus's latest release, offering a new narrative angle on familiar works by Tallis, Tye and Sheppard and a hook for less well-known music by William Mundy, Anthony Newman and Philip van Wilder.

It's a clever concept and one meticulously, if occasionally rather optimistically, documented in the album's unattributed booklet-notes, which make valiant attempts to tie each work back to 1555. At its best it allows Gallicantus to extend their reach beyond sacred motets, setting up frictions and unexpected harmonies between these and secular works such as Tallis's delicate part-songs



Musica Secreta bring joyful exuberance and supple beauty to motets from a 16th-century convent in 'Lucrezia Borgia's Daughter'

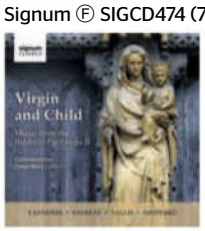
'Like as the doleful dove' and 'When shall my sorrowful sighing slack' (deftly sung by Gabriel Crouch and Mark Chambers respectively), and Newman's tiny lute fantasia *Fansye* (Elizabeth Kenny), mirroring the 16th century's own blurred lines between sacred and secular worlds.

The addition of soprano Zoë Brookshaw allows the ensemble greater textural variety and flexibility, making something rapt and cooly beautiful of Tye's *Peccavimus cum patribus*. Her delayed entry musically lifts eyes heavenwards, leavening the darker shades of Tallis's *Loquebantur variis linguis* and Sheppard's *Libera nos*, which both sit here at a strikingly low pitch. It's an effect that works better for the Sheppard – grasping out of the depths for salvation – than it does for Tallis's urgent Pentecostal Babel, which inevitably loses some of its glinting brilliance in the two duelling upper parts.

Gallicantus still have one of the airiest and most malleable sounds around, translucent through the vocal texture. Allied to performances minutely responsive to rhetorical and musical gestures, it makes a strong case for these performances, even for listeners wedded to a treble line. **Alexandra Coghlan**

'Virgin and Child'

'Music from the Baldwin Partbooks, Vol 2'
Fayrfax Ave Dei Patris filia **Sheppard** Verbum caro **Tallis** Gaude gloriosa Dei mater. Magnificat. Videte miraculum **Taverner** Mater Christi **R White** Regina caeli. Tota pulchra es
Contrapunctus / Owen Rees
Signum Ⓕ SIGCD474 (75' • DDD • T/t)



After two albums of penitential motets and two *Gramophone* Early Music Award nominations, Contrapunctus swap shrouds for swaddling clothes in a disc of Marian music. It's a repertoire richly served by the Baldwin Partbooks, and this collection offers just a taste of those riches, ranging from Fayrfax's *Ave Dei Patris filia* – an extravagant hymn of praise to the Queen of Heaven – to the sensual love song that is White's *Tota pulchra es* and Mary's own song of joy, the *Magnificat*, set here by Tallis.

With only eight tracks, this doesn't look like your average disc of polyphony. But then this is anything but average polyphony: structurally these are some of the most breathtaking works of their era, the musical equivalent of the great Gothic cathedrals. The opening track – Tallis's *Gaude gloriosa Dei mater* – is a 20-minute marvel, unfolding in massive contrapuntal arches that need such control and precision of pacing if they are not to collapse. Owen Rees's instinct for long-form structures is unerring, making sense not only of the Tallis but also of the disc's two large-scale antiphons: Sheppard's ecstatic *Verbum caro* and Tallis's *Videte miraculum*, where a lovely sense of pulse and movement underpins even the most static of harmonic passages.

The choral sound is distinctive. Astringent countertenors pierce through sweet, rounded sopranos, and the whole is anchored by a wonderful breadth in the basses. With comparatively small numbers there's greater muscularity here than, say, The Sixteen, which is particularly well suited to the earlier works – the Fayrfax and the austere beauty of Taverner's *Mater Christi*. Just occasionally you get a flicker of shrillness in the upper voices in this high-lying repertoire, a glimpse of the furious technical paddling required beneath the surface to keep these lines afloat, but it's a small quibble. Contrapunctus remain king in a very crowded market place.
Alexandra Coghlan

REISSUES

Jed Distler welcomes a New York Philharmonic 175th Anniversary box-set from Sony Classical



Rich pickings from the Big Apple

Many of the finest conductors of the 20th century appear with New York's great orchestra

The New York Philharmonic celebrates its 175th anniversary in 2017, and the responsibility for the inevitable big box-set falls upon Sony Classical, current custodians of the RCA Victor and CBS Masterworks labels for whom the orchestra made the majority of its commercial recordings. Curators James H North and Michael H Gray, together with the orchestra's historian and archivist Barbara Hawes, have mined the discography for a well-considered overview spanning 78 years' worth of recording activity and contained on 65 discs (listed for about £150 or $140).

If a cursory glance at the contents suggests a skewed representation of the orchestra's recorded accomplishments under their various music directors, bear in mind that the Philharmonic made relatively fewer recordings between the late 1920s and late 1950s in relation to their Philadelphia and Boston colleagues. With the arrival of stereo and a new, charismatic music director named Leonard Bernstein, the Philharmonic considerably stepped up studio activity, which explains why Bernstein is allotted 25 out of the collection's 65 discs. Zubin Mehta also presided over a 12-year tenure, yet made far fewer recordings for the label, while Kurt Masur and the Philharmonic appeared only once on Sony Classical (in Dvořák's Cello Concerto with Yo-Yo Ma). Furthermore, the recent Lorin Maazel and Alan Gilbert eras are amply represented via live downloads on the orchestra's own label.

Many of these recordings have held reference status. Little can be added, for example, to the heaps of praise lavished on Willem Mengelberg's 1928 Strauss *Ein Heldenleben* (far more disciplined than the conductor's relatively caricatured Concertgebouw remake), the Arturo Toscanini 1936 Beethoven Seventh (here with the revised 'alternate' first-movement introduction take), Bernstein's Copland and Boulez's Bartók. On the other hand, two examples of the orchestra's 1917 vintage under music director Josef Stranksy hold less musical than historical interest.

While Mengelberg holds his rhetorical tendencies in relative check throughout his 1930 Beethoven *Eroica* (with exposition repeat atypically observed for the era), the live 1933 Toscanini Beethoven Fifth (receiving its first 'official', and finest, transfer) reveals a more rhetorical, massively textured interpretation compared to the maestro's NBC orchestra renditions. Composer/critic Virgil Thomson called a live 1940 Barbirolli/New York Sibelius Second 'dull and brutal', but that's hardly true about their studio version of the same year, to say nothing of their smoldering Ravel *La valse*. There's a sweetness and lyrical charm to the Barbirolli Schubert Fourth absent from his less subtle Brahms Second; I wish instead that Artur Rodzinski's more disciplined and classically contained Philharmonic recording had been selected.

> If Mitropoulos was an erratic interpreter and programme builder, he was electrifying when on form

For all of the tumult and unease of the Rodzinski/New York years, they made some of the best orchestral recordings of the 1940s. Several are here, like the Wagner *Die Walküre* Act 3, the Sibelius Fourth, the Tchaikovsky *Pathétique*, a Rachmaninov Second Symphony with more sinew than schmaltz, and a Prokofiev Fifth that bests Koussevitsky's premiere Boston traversal. Bruno Walter was never the Philharmonic's music director in name, but his genial relationship with the ensemble also brought forth memorable discs. Walter would eventually improve on his 1941 Beethoven Third and Fifth, but not on the 1948 Dvořák Eighth or the last three Mozart symphonies recorded in the 1950s. Leopold Stokowski's classic versions of the Vaughan Williams Sixth Symphony in its original version, Messiaen's *L'Ascension* and excerpts from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* have pretty much held up over time, albeit not to the degree of his best Philadelphia recordings.

Perhaps the most valuable segment of this collection occupies the seven discs devoted to Dimitri Mitropoulos, whose complete RCA and CBS recordings deserve their own box-set treatment. If Mitropoulos was an erratic interpreter and programme builder, he was electrifying when on form, and the orchestra responded in turn. By modern standards their famous live 1951 concert version of Berg's *Wozzeck* is hardly a paradigm of accuracy, but the dramatic impetus, innate musical sense and vivid vocal characterisations still pack a punch. So do the last two Scriabin symphonies, plus the powerful Shostakovich Tenth and Borodin Second Symphonies. You'll never hear Henri Rabaud's shimmering *La Procession* nocturne played better, while the sense of colour and inflection informing three Saint-Saëns' tone-poems speaks for itself.

The range and breadth of Bernstein's Philharmonic output on disc is pretty astonishing, and casts a wider net compared with his later DG discography. One can cynically accuse

this collection's curators of pandering to the masses by including a good number of popular suites, overtures and crowd pleasers, but the truth is that Bernstein lavished them with detailed care and more than sneaking affection. Happily, Bernstein is amply served by symphonic substance. For his own Second Symphony (*The Age of Anxiety*), we get Bernstein's 1950 mono recording with Lukas Foss playing the living daylights out of the piano part, and the final movement prior to its later revision. Recent reissue projects have favoured Bernstein's first Berlioz *Symphonie fantastique* instead of the superior 1968 remake included here in a splendid new remastering. His advocacy for American music was, of course, legendary (Ives, Copland, Schuman, Gershwin), as was his proselytising on Mahler's behalf, while the hard-to-please Stravinsky endorsed Bernstein's 1958 *The Rite of Spring*. Less discussed, yet equally essential to the Bernstein legacy, are the rarely performed Goldmark *Rustic Wedding* Symphony, a Holst *Planets* on the level of Boult/Philharmonia and Karajan/Vienna (well, almost on their level!), incomparable Haydn and possibly the finest Dvořák *New World* Symphony on record.



Leonard Bernstein, music director of the NYPO from 1958 to 1969, appears on 25 of the set's 65 discs

The late Leon Rudin, who played violin with the Philharmonic, told me that he thought that the orchestra played more precisely under Pierre Boulez than anyone else. Indeed, their Ravel is quite crystalline, if not so sensual or atmospheric as comparable Munch or Martinon recordings. However, if you want passion and theatricality, the 1980 Zubin Mehta Verdi Requiem will be a welcome surprise, with Plácido Domingo and Montserrat Caballé pretty close to their primes, along with mezzo-soprano Bianca Berini and Metropolitan Opera stalwart bass Paul Plishka.

Deems Taylor's dated yet skillfully scored *Through the Looking Glass* suite was revived by frequent guest conductor André Kostelanetz for a previously unpublished 1975 recording; Taylor was intermission commentator for the Philharmonic's 1930s radio broadcasts and an important name in what Virgil Thomson slyly referred to as 'the music appreciation racket'.

The curatorial vision governing a box-set of this size and scope often provokes critical nitpicking, and I don't hesitate to throw in my two cents. I would have traded the grungy sounding Charles Munch Saint-Saëns *Organ* Symphony (his stereo Boston remake is infinitely better played and engineered) for more vintage Rodzinski, such as the Copland *Lincoln Portrait* with narrator Kenneth Spencer, the Bizet Symphony in C and a Wagner *Siegfried Idyll* comparable to Toscanini's – all long unavailable. Since Bruno Walter led the world premiere of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, why pass over his magnificent and excellently engineered stereo Philharmonic traversal in favour of the oft-reissued Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, or leave his blazing 1946 Schubert Ninth in limbo? I regret that none of frequent guest conductor and future music advisor George Szell's New York recordings were included. There are two Stravinsky *Rite of Springs* (the 1940 composer-led recording and Bernstein's staggering 1958 version), but not one of the Philharmonic's four complete *Petrushka* ballets, respectively led by Mitropoulos, Bernstein, Boulez and Mehta. Nor does the all-Gershwin soundtrack to Woody Allen's film *Manhattan* have serious bearing on Mehta's tenure. And given the orchestra's recent forays into concert versions of American musical theatre classics, doesn't their live 1985 Stephen Sondheim 'Follies in Concert' released by RCA deserve a place in this collection?

Still, there's plenty of great music making and opportunity for comparing various Philharmonic vintages. The ensemble may not have equalled the Philadelphia Orchestra's sumptuous string blend, the imposing might of the Chicago Symphony's collective brass (especially during the Solti era), or the pinpointed veneer of the Cleveland Orchestra's chamber-like aesthetic. Yet the mid-20th century boasted few American orchestras with the New York Philharmonic's eclectic bent, quick adaptability, and ability to deliver world-class goods under almost any circumstance. In this sense, the orchestra always has reflected the character of its city, and I hope it always will.

Jed Distler

THE RECORDING

New York Philharmonic 175th Anniversary Edition Sony Classical (65 discs) 88985 33636-2

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Opera



Richard Lawrence on Mercadante's Francesca da Rimini:

'If you want to hear bel canto magnificently performed by singers you have probably never heard of, go and buy this' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 95



Hugo Shirley on a 'verismo' recital from Krassimira Stoyanova:

'It's a bright and powerful sound – less rich and plummy than Netrebko, a great deal steelier than Gheorghiu' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 100

Bellini

Adelson e Salvini
Simone Alberghini *bar* ..... Lord Adelson
Daniela Barcellona *mez* ..... Nelly
Enea Scala *ten* ..... Salvini
Maurizio Muraro *bass* ..... Bonifacio
Rodion Pogossov *bar* ..... Colonel Struley
David Soar *bass* ..... Geronio
Kathryn Rudge *mez* ..... Fanny
Leah-Marian Jones *mez* ..... Madama Rivers
Opera Rara Chorus; BBC Symphony Orchestra / Daniele Rustioni
Opera Rara Ⓕ ② ORC56 (153' • DDD)
Includes synopsis, text and translation



Vincenzo Bellini's first opera *Adelson e Salvini* is a real rarity – so the perfect candidate for an Opera Rara resurrection. As the equivalent of 'head boy' at Naples Conservatory, Bellini was invited to compose a graduation opera, staged in 1825. Using an existing libretto by Andre Leone Tottola, it's a melodramatic tale set in 18th-century Ireland of Lord Adelson and his friendship with a neurotic Italian painter, Salvini, who has fallen in love with Adelson's fiancée, the virtuous Nelly. Throw in a dastardly uncle, Colonel Struley, who is plotting to kidnap Nelly to prevent the wedding, plus Bonifacio – Bellini's only comic role, performed in Neapolitan dialect – and you have a quirky piece.

At the premiere, the three female roles were taken by male altos from the conservatory, with Nelly sung by 14-year-old Giacinto Marras. As a result, it's the male leads which are better developed. There's evidence that Bellini wanted to restage the opera, and revisions and additions are included as four appendices here. *Adelson* wasn't put on again until 1985 but the original orchestral parts weren't found until 2001, so anyone vaguely familiar with Nuova Era's unsatisfactory 1992 live recording will hear several differences.

Following the Rossinian model, Bellini pilfered the best bits for use in later operas. The Overture is basically that later used for *Il pirata*, while Nelly's aria 'Dopo l'oscuro nembo', which crops up on a number of recital discs, was later transposed for soprano as 'O quante volte' in *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*. Young Italian conductor Daniele Rustioni is a convincing advocate for the score, directing an urgent account from the BBC Symphony Orchestra to inject maximum drama.

The singing is impressive, with a few caveats. Enea Scala, a light tenor with a touch of metal at the top, does a terrific job as the temperamental artist, Salvini, especially in the fine Act 3 aria with chorus. Stylish baritone Rodion Pogossov has a nice bite to the voice as the wicked Struley and Maurizio Muraro enjoys himself enormously as the Rossinian buffo character, Bonifacio. Adelson's appearance is delayed until the Act 1 finale, where the florid coloratura challenges the soft-grained bass-baritone Simone Alberghini. Daniela Barcellona's mezzo becomes tremulous as she heads up the stave, but registers emotion well as Nelly.

The mix of vocal numbers and clunky dialogue – given in very pointed thespian delivery – make following the libretto in Opera Rara's excellent booklet essential.
Mark Pullinger

Gluck · Mozart

'loves me...loves me not...'
Gluck Armide – Ah! Si la liberté; Enfin, il est en ma puissance...Ah quelle cruauté. Iphigénie en Tauride – O malheureuse Iphigénie. Orfeo ed Euridice – Qual vita...Che fiero momento **Mozart** Così fan tutte – Ei parte... Per pietà ben mio perdona; Temerari, sortite... Come scoglio. Idomeneo – Overture; Quando avran...Padre, germani, addio; Solitudini amiche...Zeffiretti lusinghieri. Le nozze di Figaro – E Susanna non vien!... Dove sono; Giunse alfin il momento... Deh vieni, non tardar
Camilla Tilling *sop*
Musica Saeculorum / Philipp von Steinaecker
BIS Ⓕ SACD BIS2234 (66' • DDD/DSD)
Includes texts and translations



It is extraordinary to think that a generation or two ago Gluck's tragic heroines were being sung by sopranos such as Kirsten Flagstad and Maria Callas. Times have changed: Camilla Tilling makes a good case for programming arias from *Armide* and *Iphigénie en Tauride* alongside the contemporary Mozart roles of Ilia, Susanna, Countess and Fiordiligi. By and large her selection works well.

The disc opens with the Overture to *Idomeneo*, played by the period-instrument Musica Saeculorum under Philipp von Steinaecker with a grandeur more usual from a conventional orchestra. Ilia is one of Tilling's favourite roles and she sings two of the arias, 'Padre, germani, addio' and 'Zeffiretti lusinghieri', with a silvery grace, enlivened by the occasional hint of a fast vibrato. Her Susanna and Countess are nicely differentiated, the latter's 'Dove sono' touchingly inward at the reprise. She has said that she was nervous about progressing up to Fiordiligi but 'Come scoglio' is where this disc takes off with a newly urgent sense of drama, and 'Per pietà' makes a virtue of her lightness of voice (the first Fiordiligi, Adriana Ferrerese del Bene, was also an early Susanna).

Of the Gluck, the most engaging is the intensely felt 'Che fiero momento' of Eurydice, a role Tilling has portrayed notably on stage. It is good to have Armide's Act 2 aria, 'Ah! Si la liberté', and she is suitably affecting in it, though other sopranos have given the music greater depth of colour. The same might also be said of 'O malheureuse Iphigénie', which brings the recital to a dignified close. Everything here is well judged and sympathetically sung, if only more characterful voices from the past – Margaret Price's Countess, Régine Crespin's Iphigénie, perhaps the Fiordiligi of Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, more of an acquired taste – did not keep intruding from one's memory. **Richard Fairman**

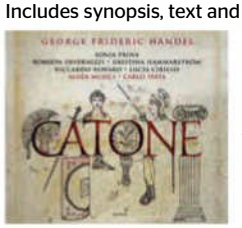


'A real rarity': Simone Alberghini (Lord Adelson) and Enea Scala (Salvini) recording Bellini's first opera for Opera Rara

Handel

Catone (pasticcio, compiled and arranged by Handel from **Leo**'s Catone and music by **Hasse**, **Porpora**, **Vinci** and **Vivaldi**)

Sonia Prina *contr* ..... Catone
Riccardo Novaro *bar* ..... Cesare
Roberta Invernizzi *sop* ..... Emilia
Kristina Hammarström *mez* ..... Arbace
Lucia Cirillo *mez* ..... Marzia
Auser Musici / Carlo Ipata
Glossa Ⓕ ② GCD923511 (125' • DDD)
Includes synopsis, text and translation



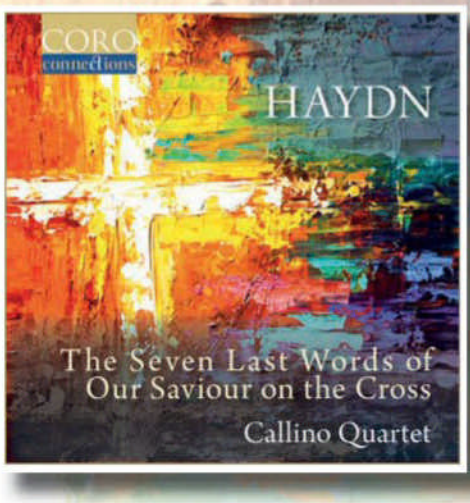
Metastasio's drama about the Roman patriot Cato's preference to commit suicide rather than submit to the dictator Julius Caesar was first set to music by Vinci (Rome, 1728), but soon afterwards the poet rewrote the final act; this revised version was set to music by Leo (Venice, 1728), although nine arias by other composers were used. Handel might have attended a performance of Leo's opera while in Italy recruiting new singers, and in 1732 he used it as the basis of a *pasticcio* for the London stage. He carried over the overture and nine arias from Leo's score but the rest of the arias were swapped for music by Hasse (six arias), Porpora (four), Vivaldi (at least two) and Vinci (one); it is unlikely Handel chose many (if any) of these substitutions – most were taken from the repertoire of the singers in his company (a few months later the same cast premiered *Orlando*). His limited creative involvement was the abridgement and adjustment of Leo's recitatives.

The authorship of the arias is cited in Glossa's booklet, which does not explain that Carlo Ipata's performance makes heavy cuts to almost all recitatives, omits two arias from Act 2 and reshapes the opera into two halves (rather than three acts). This massacres the dramatic congruence of a plot already rendered threadbare by Handel: for example, the climactic confrontation in which Cato saves his enemy Cesare from ignoble assassination (a key part of Act 3) is bowdlerised; even the reporting of Cato's suicide in the final scene is truncated.

Sonia Prina sings numerous Leo arias as the tragic hero Cato, whose intense bitterness at his daughter Marzia's confession that she loves his enemy produces stirring dramatic music of the highest quality ('Dovea svenarti all'ora'). Lucia Cirillo displays plenty of vocal skill and theatrical sureness as Marzia: 'Confusa, smarrita spiegarti vorrei' (Leo) vividly portrays Marzia's torn loyalties between her lover and her father, and the opera concludes with her defiant heroism as she vows vengeance ('Vo solcando un mar crudele' from Vinci's *Artaserse*). Riccardo Novaro's Cesare is a dictator with plenty of swagger in his frustrated declaration of war to Cato (a parody of 'Benché nasconda' from Vivaldi's *Orlando furioso*), but his roughshod singing in Porpora's murmuring 'È ver che all'amo intorno' lacks the suave melodicism that the music cries out for. As the widow of Cesare's vanquished rival Pompey, Roberta Invernizzi sings with her customary agility and sweet suppleness in arias by Porpora and Hasse (although decisions to sing final cadences up an octave are an unconvincing misstep). Kristina Hammarström's pinpoint coloratura combines delightfully with Auser Musici's responsive strings in Arbace's 'Vaghe luci, luci belle' (unmistakably Vivaldi). The brutal minimisation of recitatives and the project's origin as a concert at the Halle Festival hinder persuasive characterisations, and in such circumstances the recording is not a credible litmus test of whether the *pasticcio* might be an effective drama in its own right. Nevertheless, there is much here to enjoy thanks to Auser Musici's accomplished playing and the talented cast of singers. **David Vickers**

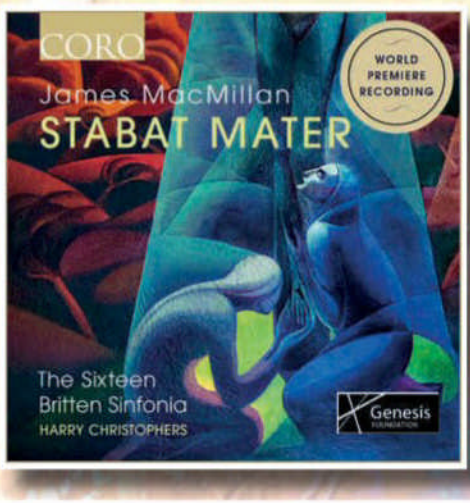
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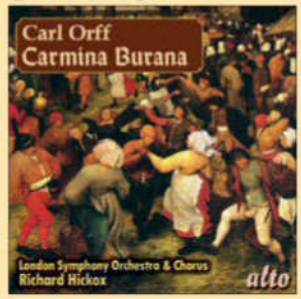
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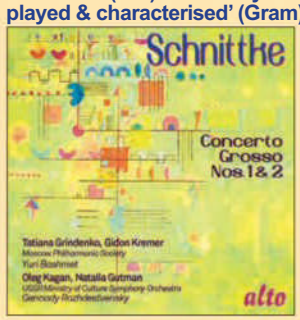
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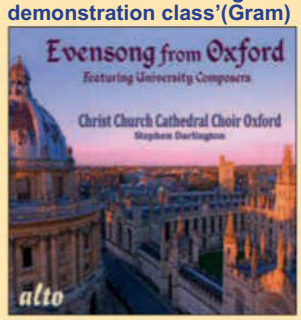
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Handel

'Queens – opera arias premiered by Francesca Cuzzoni and Anna Maria Strada del Pò'

Alcina – Ah mio cor, schernito sei!. **Berenice** – No che servire altrui. Traditore, traditore. **Giulio Cesare in Egitto** – Overture; Che sento...Se pietà di me non senti; Da tempesta il legno infranto; Piangerò la sorte mia; Tu la mia stella sei. **Giustino** – Quel torrente. **Lotario** – Scherza in mar la navicella. **Poro** – Se mai turbo il tuo riposo. **Scipione** – Sinfonia, Act 3; Scoglio d'immota fronte

Roberta Invernizzi *sop*

Accademia Hermans / Fabio Ciofini

Glossa Ⓕ GCD922904 (78' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



Few sopranos are better equipped to sing this repertoire stylishly, attractively and with subtle characterisation than Roberta Invernizzi. 'Queens' presents the customary warhorses written for Francesca Cuzzoni (most of Cleopatra's famous arias from *Giulio Cesare* and the valorous tour de force 'Scoglio d'immota fronte' from *Scipione*), and there are a couple of favourite lollipops composed for Anna Maria Strada del Pò: the resolute 'Scherza in mar la navicella' (*Lotario*) makes an exciting opening number (Invernizzi's tasteful embellishments are a model of intelligent artistry but the orchestra does not unleash the flamboyant energy Handel surely intended); Alcina's broken-hearted 'Ah mio cor' is placed suitably towards the end (nobody will care that Alcina isn't a queen when hearing Invernizzi's moving performance). The choices of other Strada arias are less predictable: Cleofide's 'Se mai turbo il tuo riposo' (*Poro*) is performed with unusual sweetness and Invernizzi makes a good fist of Arianna's florid 'Quel torrente' (*Giustino*).

Accademia Hermans play with a pleasing awareness of how to accompany without forcing the singer to compete for space. Anachronistic harp continuo is prominent in slower arias but harpsichordist Fabio Ciofini directs with a sure ear for elegance, line and amiable theatricality: 'Tu la mia stella sei' has a rare sort of relaxed gracefulness and 'Da tempesta' trips along with refreshing lightness of touch, but the small group of strings lacks dramatic weight in 'Se pietà' and 'Ah mio cor' – although Invernizzi sings both laments superbly. The musicianship of all participants stays on the right side of clichés or caprices even when walking on well-trod ground. **David Vickers**

Mercadante

Francesca da Rimini

Leonor Bonilla *sop* ..... Francesca
Aya Wakizono *mez* ..... Paolo
Merto Sungu *ten* ..... Lanciotto
Antonio Di Matteo *bass* ..... Guido
Larisa Martinez *sop* ..... Isaura
Ivan Ayon Rivas *ten* ..... Guelfo

Chorus of the Transylvanian State Philharmonic Orchestra of Cluj-Napoca; Italian International Orchestra / Fabio Luisi

Stage director **Pier Luigi Pizzi**

Video director **Matteo Ricchetti**

Dynamic Ⓜ ③ CDS7753; Ⓕ ② DVD 37753; Ⓕ BD 57753 (3h 20' • DDD • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • s)

Recorded live at the Palazzo Ducale, Martina Franca, Italy, July & August 2016

Synopsis included; text and translation available from **dynamic.it**



This is a surprise: the first-ever production of Mercadante's *Francesca da Rimini*, given last year at the opera festival in Martina Franca, a hilltop town in the heel of Italy. It was composed in 1830 for Madrid but the composer withdrew it after a disagreement with the management of the theatre; a production at La Scala also failed to materialise, and that was that.

The historical Paolo and Francesca were adulterous lovers in 13th-century Rimini; they were murdered by Lanciotto, who was Francesca's husband and Paolo's elder brother. Following the couple's appearance in Dante's *Inferno*, the story was treated by many composers, including Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov. In this version, Francesca has fallen in love with Paolo before being forced to marry Lanciotto for political reasons. The husband has his suspicions, which are confirmed when he finds the lovers embracing after reading the tale of Lancelot and Guinevere (rendered as Geneva in the subtitles, one of many absurdities). Both are saved from death by the armed intervention of Guido, Francesca's father. Francesca vows to take the veil; she and Paolo are interrupted again by Lanciotto and they end up dead after all.

The libretto, by Felice Romani but apparently adapted by other hands, is serviceable but misses a few tricks: Guido, responsible for his daughter's unhappy marriage, comes across as a sympathetic character; and there is no follow-up to Lanciotto's assuring him that Francesca detests Paolo. The consensus on Mercadante's operas seems to be that they are rather less than the sum of their parts, lacking dramatic thrust and memorable tunes. *Francesca da Rimini* is certainly a leisurely stroll, the first act lasting an hour and 50 minutes, but the musical scenery is beautiful and there are some exquisite blooms on the way. The opera is very much of its time: Paolo is a trouser role, like Bellini's Romeo (also from 1830), and there is much coloratura for the three main characters. Mercadante has a perhaps surprising feel for orchestral colour, the writing for four horns in the trio 'Cielo, i miei voti' being particularly lovely.

One set serves throughout, a wall with blind windows, plus a platform in front of the orchestra. The characters all wear cloaks, which billow furiously throughout: what starts as puzzling becomes distracting and then irritating. Is it a knowing reference to the winds that buffet the lovers for ever in the Inferno? Inappropriate, if so, as it's not just Paolo and Francesca but everybody on stage who is affected. The acting is all right, not hammy, but shots of the orchestra and conductor when the singers are on the platform make theatrical illusion hard to sustain.

Better, I would suggest, to go for the CDs. Some ill-tuned chording apart, Fabio Luisi gets excellent playing from his orchestra – warm, tender strings in the Act 1 finale, fine obbligatos – and the chorus sings lustily. And the solo singing is stupendous. Merto Sungu is thrilling, Leonor Bonilla sings with bell-like clarity, with good coloratura and trills, and the Japanese Aya Wakizono is a mezzo in a thousand. If you want to hear *bel canto* magnificently performed by singers you have probably never heard of, go out and buy the discs right now. **Richard Lawrence**

Meyerbeer

'Grand Opera'

L'Africaine – Anna, qu'entends-je...Adieu mon doux rivage[a]; Là-bas, sous l'arbre noir...Fleurs nouvelles. **Alimelek** – Nun in der Dämm'rung Stille. **Il crociato in Egitto** – D'una madre disperta...Con qual gioia[b]. **Emma di Resburgo** – Sulla rupe triste, sola...Ah questo bacio. **L'étoile du nord** – Ah, mon Dieu!...C'est bien l'air que chaque matin. **Ein Feldlager in Schlesien** – Oh Schwester, find' ich dich!...Lebe wohl, geliebte Schwester[a]. **Les Huguenots** – O beau pays de la Touraine...A ce mot sul s'anime[c] **Le pardon de Ploúrmel** – Comme cette nuit est lente à se dissiper!...Ombre légère. **Le Prophète** – Mon coeur s'élance et palpite. **Robert le diable** – Robert, toi que j'aime[d]

Diana Damrau *sop* **Chorus and Orchestra of Lyon National Opera / Emmanuel Villaume** with [c]**Pascale Obrecht**, [c]**Pei min Yu** *sops* [a]**Kate Aldrich**, [c]**Joanna Curelaru** *mezs* [d]**Charles Workman** *ten* [b]**Laurent Naouri** *bass-bar*

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Erato Ⓕ 9029 58490-1 (81' • DDD)
Includes texts and translations



There's a great deal to admire in this release, the realisation of a long-cherished idea for Diana Damrau. It's meticulously sung, well researched and beautifully presented. And don't be fooled by the 'grand opera' title: it's not just a matter of works in the spectacular genre with which Meyerbeer is most closely associated. There's repertoire in German and Italian as well as from French *opéras* both *grands* and *comiques*, plus plenty of music from before the composer conquered Paris, going back as far as the singspiel *Alimelek, oder Die beiden Kalifen* (1814).

Damrau's own enthusiastic note in the booklet emphasises the variety that the programme demonstrates. And, to a certain extent, we hear that as we run the gamut from charming simplicity in the German works, Rossinian fireworks in the Italian ones to, well, Meyerbeerian fireworks in the French.

But having a whole disc of soprano arias by a composer whose major concern never seems to have been three-dimensional characterisation also seems to undermine the very point Damrau is trying to make. A third of the arias feature extensive flute obliggato, for example, others clarinet – or both. Perky coloratura, dispatched with cool aplomb by Damrau, is a standard device. Meyerbeer could certainly string notes (and lots of them) together fluently, but he struggled to hit upon truly memorable melodies.

There's still plenty of originality, though. Take the mournful, heartfelt cor anglais solo in Isabelle's 'Robert, toi que j'aime', which looks forward to Berlioz's 'D'amour l'ardente flamme' (while also bearing a less fortunate melodic similarity to Monsieur Triquet's ditty in *Eugene Onegin*) – and Damrau rises to some exciting drama in its final moments. She's also outstanding in Palmide's 'Con qual gioia' (from *Il crociato*), which feels like three virtuoso arias for the price of one, and the extensive vocal fluff of Marguerite's 'Ô beau pays de la Touraine' (*Les Huguenots*).

The soprano's technique remains unruffled regardless of what challenges are thrown her way, a tendency to sag on trills notwithstanding. But the voice is not big on colouristic variety and only hints at steely determination rarely, emphasising the somewhat passive, generic nature of many of the women represented here. Sample someone like Natalie Dessay in the ubiquitous 'Ombre légère' to hear what more can be done. The scholarly and detailed booklet essay might have helped, too, had it furnished us with dramatic as well as musicological context for the music.

The Lyon Opera forces under Emmanuel Villaume offer fluent, lively support (I hope the flautist got paid overtime), as do the other singers making cameos. This is certainly a useful, generously filled and well-recorded compendium, better for dipping into rather than consuming in one sitting. Whether it will do anything to change your mind on Meyerbeer himself is another matter.

Hugo Shirley

Puccini

Turandot *(compl Hao Weiya)*

Sun Xuiwei *sop* ..... Turandot
Dai Yuqiang *ten* ..... Calaf
Yao Hong *sop* ..... Liù
Liu Songhu *bar* ..... Ping
Li Xiang *bar* ..... Pang
Chen Yong *ten* ..... Pong
Tian Haojiang *bass* ..... Timur
Liu Naiqi *ten* ..... Emperor Altoum
Chorus and Orchestra of the China National Centre for the Performing Arts, Beijing / Daniel Oren
Stage director Chen Xinyi
Video director Tiziano Mancini
Accentus Ⓕ DVD ACC20338 (127' • NTSC • 16:9 • DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 9 • s)
Recorded live, October 2013

Mozart

Le nozze di Figaro

Li Ao *bass-bar* ..... Figaro
Huang Ying *sop* ..... Susanna
Zhou Zhengzhong *bar* ..... Count Almaviva
Yu Guanqun *sop* ..... Countess Almaviva
Xu Lei *sop* ..... Cherubino
Zhang Zhuo *mez* ..... Marcellina
Guan Zhijing *bass* ..... Bartolo
Li Xiang *ten* ..... Don Basilio
Liang Yufeng *ten* ..... Don Curzio
Zhao Ming *bass* ..... Antonio
Li Xintong *sop* ..... Barbarina
Chorus and Orchestra of the China National Centre for the Performing Arts, Beijing / Lü Jia
Stage director José Luis Castro
Video director Hanning Kasten
Accentus Ⓕ ② DVD ACC20307
(177' • NTSC • 16:9 • DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)
Recorded live, January 2014





There has to be a certain fascination in seeing Puccini's *Turandot* performed by an all-Chinese cast in Beijing. Chen Xinyi's production gives an insight into the state of opera in China, on one of a pair of DVD releases from the China National Centre for the Performing Arts.

A massive set is framed by giant crouching stone lions, replaced by dragons in Act 2's scarlet palace. It's the sort of thing you'd be happy to encounter in the Verona Arena, with lots of dancers and acrobats and an enormous chorus. Up close, there are problems: an executioner's knife that doesn't look as if it could cut butter, and Calaf striking a gong that doesn't budge an inch.

Daniel Oren conducts an exciting account, but the vocal performances are mixed. Liù, vibrato-laden and devoid of consonants, should probably be singing Turandot. During 'Signore, ascolta' you sense her treading on eggshells to rein in her voice. On the other hand, Turandot is sung by a tremulous lyric soprano who is severely stretched by 'In questa reggia'. Worst of all is Dai Yuqiang's Calaf, trying to channel Mario del Monaco in heroic tone but often singing woefully flat. Tian Haojiang's Timur is decent, but this one is for curiosity value only.

In his production of *Le nozze di Figaro*, José Luis Castro 'stoutly refuses to disavow the original intentions of author and composer' (so the booklet tells us). In other words, it's a mega-traditional staging, prettily costumed, where there is a nagging sense that the principals are going through the motions without always seeming to know exactly what they're singing. 'Look at the little devil run!' exclaims Susanna when Cherubino leaps out of the Countess's window…yet it's so high she can barely reach up to close it, let alone see what's going on outside!

There are good vocal performances here, especially from baritone Zhou Zhengzhong as the predatory Count Almaviva. Li Ao is a likeable Figaro, his sturdy baritone having an oaky warmth. Xu Lei's Cherubino – if a little hyperactive – is well sung, as is Huang Ying's Susanna. Yu Guanqun, a soprano who frequently performs in Italy, is strangely disengaged as the Countess, wearing a perturbed expression. Her soprano suffers a huge flutter and she

seems to be making up some vocal lines in 'Dove sono'. Conductor Lü Jia is efficient, no more, the low point being a plodding 'Sull'aria' that seems as if it will never end. **Mark Pullinger**

Paisiello

La grotta di Trofonio

Benedetta Mazzucato *mez* ..... Dori
Caterina Di Tonno *sop* ..... Rubinetta
Matteo Mezzaro *ten* ..... Artemidoro
Domenico Colaianni *bar* ..... Don Gasperone
Angela Nisi *sop* ..... Eufelia
Daniela Mazzucato *sop* ..... Madama Bartolina
Roberto Scandiuzzi *bass* ..... Trofonio
Giorgio Caoduro *bar* ..... Don Piastrone
Italian International Orchestra / Giuseppe Grazioli

Dynamic Ⓕ ② CDS7754 (148' • DDD)
Synopsis included; text and translation available from **dynamic.it**
Recorded live at the Palazzo Ducale, Martina Franca, Italy, July 14, 2016



Hard on the heels of *Fedra* (1/17) comes another Paisiello opera from Dynamic. Are we on the verge of a Paisiello revival? (He was a significant figure, by far the most popular opera composer in the Vienna of Mozart's time.) Probably not: the reason for both productions was to mark the bicentenary of the composer's death in 1816. *Fedra*, with its strong plot, was worth reviving, but the complexity of *Trofonio's Cave* will test your credulity; it certainly taxed my patience.

La grotta di Trofonio was produced in Naples at the end of 1785. The libretto by Giuseppe Palomba was adapted from one written by Giovanni Battista Casti for Salieri, whose version had been performed in Vienna only a couple of months earlier. Don Piastrone is a ridiculous figure, given to quoting from classical philosophers. He has two daughters, the frivolous Dori and the bookish Eufelia, who wish for husbands to match their characters. They are wooed by Don Gasperone and Artemidoro respectively, though the latter really prefers Dori. The cave in which the fearsome-looking magician Trofonio dwells has special properties: anyone entering will experience a complete change of personality, which can only be reversed by re-entering by another way. The situations arising from this are further complicated by the arrival of Madama Bartolina and Rubinetta, who have been deserted by the young men. Everyone is paired off by the end, not necessarily predictably or even satisfactorily. The diagram in the booklet is a helpful guide to the relationships, but the introductory article is of a mind-bending opacity. The libretto available online is essential but just as badly translated.

The music falls easily on the ear. The first part of Eufelia's 'In udir que'cari accenti', a gentle *Andante*, includes attractive writing for oboe and bassoon, while the arias for Madama Bartolina and Rubinetta are effectively scored for the strings alone. In 'Basta qui, ragazza astuta' Gasperone looks forward to Mozart's Papageno, and the quartet that opens Act 2 anticipates the mania of a Rossini comic finale. Giuseppe Grazioli conducts a lively performance that was probably good fun in the theatre. The veteran Daniela Mazzucato is a characterful Madama Bartolina; Roberto Scandiuzzi booms impressively as Trofonio. Of the less well-known singers, Caterina Di Tonno stands out as a bright-toned Rubinetta. But this is second-rate stuff, not really worth the bother. **Richard Lawrence**

Salieri

Europa riconosciuta

Diana Damrau *sop* ..... Europa
Désirée Rancatore *sop* ..... Semele
Genia Kühmeier *sop* ..... Asterio
Daniela Barcellona *mez* ..... Isséo
Giuseppe Sabbatini *ten* ..... Egisto
Alessandro Ruggiero *actor* ..... Picciolo
Chorus and Orchestra of La Scala, Milan / Riccardo Muti
Stage director **Luca Ronconi**
Video director **Pierre Cavassilas**

Erato Ⓕ DVD 9029 58899-8
(133' • NTSC • 16:9 • DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)
Includes synopsis
Recorded live, December 7, 2004



Milan's famous Teatro alla Scala was inaugurated on August 3, 1778 with a production of Salieri's new serious opera *Europa riconosciuta*. In December 2004, after three years of renovations, La Scala reopened with the first modern revival of Salieri's opera. The libretto by Mattia Verazi follows reformist principles by breaking with several conventions in order to serve the drama, such as ensembles carrying forward action, the reduction of exit arias within more flexibly constructed scenes, a prominent integration of choruses, a dramatic structure in two acts (rather than three), and even an onstage death.

La Scala's strings can be heavy-handed but Riccardo Muti has a sure sense of dramatic weighting and colour, and there is plenty of athleticism and precision in Salieri's most virile writing – notably a stormy overture that depicts a shipwreck (cleverly represented by a rotating boat in Luca Ronconi's staging). Salieri's thinking as a musical dramatist is clearly manifest in scenes that express inner conflict between divided loyalties or desperate situations – most notably Asterio's three-section Act 2 set-piece 'Del morir l'angoscie adesso', in which he bids his son and wife farewell as he is about to be put to death on account of a barbaric edict to kill the first foreigner who sets foot in Tyre (sung ardently and precisely by Genia Kühmeier). Diana Damrau and Désirée Rancatore both scintillate with vocal pyrotechnics in very high tessituras – each going up to top F sharps and Gs with impressive agility: Damrau is on magnificent form when the anguished Europa resolves to stay loyal to her condemned husband ('Ah lo sento'); if anything, Rancatore is even better in Semele's 'Quando più irato freme' (a virtuoso dialogue between stratospheric voice and *concertante* oboe that conveys a reaction to tempestuous ordeals).

Daniela Barcellona's singing is firm, dynamically flexible and expressive as the noble hero Isséo (who eventually renounces his old love for Europa, saves her husband Asterio from execution, and acts for the good of the nation). As the self-serving villain Egisto, Giuseppe Sabbatini declaims as a 'can belto' tenor. Several choruses are sung extremely boldly by a vast body of singers positioned in rows underneath the main stage – commenting on the action almost as if in the manner of a Classical Greek chorus. Although a more idiomatic musical performance in a few respects can be imagined, this sleek production affirms Salieri's credentials as a disciple of Gluck. **David Vickers**

Verdi

Un ballo in maschera

Anja Harteros *sop* ..... Amelia
Piotr Beczała *ten* ..... Riccardo
George Petean *bar* ..... Renato
Sofia Fomina *sop* ..... Oscar
Okka von der Damerau *mez* ..... Ulrica
Anatoli Sivko *bass* ..... Samuel
Scott Conner *bass* ..... Tom
Andrea Borghini *bar* ..... Silvano
Ulrich Ress *ten* ..... Judge
Joshua Owen Mills *ten* ..... Servant
Chorus of the Bavarian State Opera; Bavarian State Orchestra / Zubin Mehta
Stage director **Johannes Erath**
Video director **Tiziano Mancini**



The first modern revival of Salieri's Europa riconosciuta at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan

C Major Entertainment Ⓕ DVD 739408; Ⓕ Blu-ray 739504 (149' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)
Recorded live, March 3-9, 2016



Heike Scheele's design for Munich's new 2016 *Ballo* takes no prisoners in terms of stage direction-obeying literalism. We get an abstract unit set in the style of 1940s Hollywood (think Hitchcock's *Notorious*) dominated by a large double bed, and giant staircases going nowhere to the sky and running up from understage. The names, but not the geography, are from Verdi's revised Boston version (Riccardo, Renato etc) but Johannes Erath's production makes use of researches made for the opera's original Swedish setting.

Piotr Beczała's Riccardo looks uncannily, but relevantly, like Anton Walbrook's ballet chief in the Powell/Pressburger *Red Shoes* movie. His ruler is self- and death-obsessed. Events that steer his fate (a pistol for suicide, the visit to Ulrica's prophesies, the meeting with Amelia) are introduced visibly here for him by Okka von der Damerau's seductive Ulrica and Sofia Fomina's bell-hop Oscar. Everything takes place in the single play area of this abstract set, so all disguises, and naturalistic scene settings, are banished: not a single mask at this ball (even Oscar doffs his wig to reveal that 'he' is a girl). The Amelia/Riccardo Act 2 meeting takes place in the bedroom with Renato asleep until he gets up to appear in the scene. Acting doubles for Riccardo and Amelia appear in this and other scenes to illustrate the characters' private fears and problems, and a ventriloquist's dummy represents Riccardo in sailor suit.

It may seem weird at first – and you could argue that it's literally pretentious – but the result is a refreshing concentration on the drama of personality and illusion that Verdi and Somma produced. This creators' achievement has sometimes been obscured in recent times by natural curiosity about – and desire to recreate – the censored original version. And, as Erath's production suggests, by an over-operatic distraction with masks rather than characters. Certainly many of the current DVD rivals from Madrid or the Met look like gilding the would-be Grand Opera lily in comparison.

Musically things are more than fine. Beczała pulls off this one hell of a tenor role – does Riccardo ever get a break? – with style and confidence. Harteros gives her usual tightly focused emotional performance. Petean is triumphantly consistent despite being faced with many of the production's non-realistic situations in which to act. And with Maestro Mehta's spacious tempos for his arias – but they and a general lack of over-heated emotion fit this visual interpretation well. With good sound and helpful shot selection the release is strongly recommended. **Mike Ashman**

'Catharsis'

Ariosti Caio Mazio Coriolano – Spirate, o oniqui marmi...Voi d'un figlio tanto misero **Caldara** Temistocle – Ah, frenate il pianto imbelle **Conti** Griselda – In te, sposa Griselda, mi uccido...Cara sposa **Handel** Admeto – Introduzzione; Orride larve...Chiudetevi miei lumi **Hasse** La conversione di Sant'Agostino – Viver vogl'io sempre per te moi dio...Or mi pento **Orlandini** Adelaide – Ciò che donò...Alza al ciel; O del moi caro ben...Già mi sembra al carro avvinto **Sarro** Valdemaro – Sorte nemica...Quando onor favella al core **Torri** Griselda – Vorresti col tuo pianto **Vivaldi** Farnace – Gelido in ogni vena
Xavier Sabata *counterten*
Armonia Atenea / George Petrou
Aparté Ⓕ AP143 (66' • DDD)
Includes texts and translations

PHOTOGRAPHY: SILVIA LELLI



'A vivid workout': countertenor Xavier Sabata and Armonia Atenea tackle an intelligently compiled Baroque programme



Notwithstanding several spelling errors in the track-listing on Aparté's back cover, this recital album's intelligent variety of dramatic atmospheres give Xavier Sabata and Armonia Atenea a vivid workout. 'Alza al ciel pianto orgogliosa' from Orlandini's *Adelaide* (Venice, 1729) is performed with steely malevolence. There is a fascinating comparison between two settings of Zeno's libretto *Griselda*: the contrapuntal minor-key strings and melodic voice part in 'Cara sposa' from Conti's version (Vienna, 1725) is a real gem of pathos-laden beauty, whereas 'Vorresti col tuo pianto' from Torri's version (Munich, 1723) has acerbic energy.

The extreme velocity of Petrou's direction and Sabata's exaggerated singing in Vivaldi's 'Gelido in ogni vena' labours the point – a little less could have been considerably more (this alto transposition is apparently from the 1730 Prague opera *Argippo*). The opening scene of Handel's *Admeto* (1727) and the prison scene from Ariosti's *Coriolano* (1723) are given intensive interpretations in which the loud and soft contrasts during accompanied recitatives are accordingly abrasive or deeply sentimental – an approach that risks diminishing nuanced coherence – but the ensuing slow arias are each articulated tenderly. Oboes and horns contribute subtly to the rococo style of Hasse's depiction of the newly converted St Augustine (Dresden, 1750), and there is a lilting gracefulness in the title-hero's 'Ah, frenate il pianto imbelle' from Caldara's *Temistocle* (Vienna, 1736).

The music-making is never devoid of interest and richness, but it is at its most persuasive when the performers let the music speak more naturally. **David Vickers**

'Verismo'

Catalani La Wally – Ebben? Ne andrò lontana **Cilea** Adriana Lecouvreur – Del sultano Amuratte; Un cofanetto? Scusate...Poveri fiori **Giordano** Andrea Chénier – La mamma morta **Mascagni** L'amico Fritz – Son pochi fiori. Lodoletta – Ah! Il suo nome! Flammen, perdonami! **Puccini** Edgar – Non più! Fermate!...Nell villagio d'Edgar. Madama Butterfly – Sai cos' ebbe cuore di pensare...Che tua madre dovrà prenderti in braccio; Un bel dì vedremo. Manon Lescaut – In quelle trine morbide; Sola, perduta, abbandonata. Suor Angelica – Senza mamma. Tosca – Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore. Turandot – Signore, ascolta!; Tanto amore segreto

Krassimira Stoyanova *sop*

Munich Radio Orchestra / Pavel Baleff

Orfeo Ⓕ C899 171A (70' • DDD)



It's not long since Anna Netrebko's 'Verismo' appeared (DG, 10/16), and Angela Gheorghiu has just announced a return to the studio for Warner Classics to produce a disc focused on the same post-Verdian corner of the repertoire. Here, though, is a 'Verismo' album from a star who, though not quite occupying the same lofty realms of the operatic galaxy, can give any of today's top divas a run for their money. Krassimira Stoyanova is a stalwart of many of the world's great opera stages (a recent Salzburg Marschallin and Danae, for example, and Muti's latest Desdemona on disc) and a singer of real quality.

The voice itself is not the most yielding or flexible instrument, and Stoyanova is maybe rather too equable in terms of temperament: tragic vulnerability, vengeful fury or last-minute leaps from battlements do not, one suspects, come naturally to her. But it's a bright and powerful sound – less rich and plummy than Netrebko, a great deal steelier than Gheorghiu – and is under total technical control.

You'll have to go some way to find a more robustly sung 'Vissi d'arte' or 'Un bel dì' than we have here, for example, and she conveys a real grandeur throughout. The slow-burn intensity she brings to Adriana Lecouvreur's 'Poveri fiori', La Wally's famous aria or 'La mamma morta' is impressive. But the highlight is probably the extended 14-minute extract from Mascagni's rarely heard *Lodeletta*, a well-written scene, movingly performed here.

There are the usual gripes about recital discs such as these, including some rather abrupt endings to numbers and slightly bland accompaniments. Orfeo's cover is a bit of a design disaster, too, and it's a shame we have only summaries of what each of the arias is about rather than full texts. But Stoyanova is a very impressive singer, and this is another commanding (and well-recorded) recital to add to the clutch already available on this label. **Hugo Shirley**

The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by jazzwise

Yazz Ahmed

La Saboteuse

Naim Ⓕ



The Bahraini-born trumpeter and flugelhornist Yazz Ahmed has real rock credentials playing with Radiohead and These New Puritans among others, but has also explored in depth her Arabic folk music roots. She brings this and more into her new recording. The brief intervallic duos featuring Ahmed's quarter-tonal muezzin call to prayer and vibraphonist Lewis Wright set the mood effectively. Folk song melodies merge with looping motifs on 'El-Emadi' with guest Swedish guitarist Samuel Hällkvist. Elsewhere 'Bloom' stands out for its catchy looping counterpoint of Ahmed's trumpet and bass clarinet courtesy of guest contributor Shabaka Hutchings; the sleepy title track echoes something of *Siesta*-era Miles while 'Organ External' sounds like a jam band The Claudia Quintet. Yazz Ahmed has the balance just right on this atmospheric yet energetic, melody-driven new album. **Selwyn Harris**

John Patitucci/Yotam Silberstein/Rogerio Boccato

Irmãos de Fé

Newvelle Records Ⓕ NV007LP



Bassist John Patitucci has long been among the instrument's elite 'doublers', distinguishing himself on double bass for 15 years as part of Wayne Shorter's renowned Quartet, while he first burst onto the international stage in the late 1980s wielding a six-string electric bass as part of Chick Corea's chops-heavy Elektric Band. *Irmãos de Fé* is a masterclass in pacing and production – the title-track kicking things off in finely poised style, side one also including the slow-motion ballad 'Pr'um Samba' and the dazzling baroque-ish unison guitar and basslines of 'Desvairada', with Patitucci's heartrending arco melody on the stunning Jobim/Moraes/Buarque-penned 'Olha Maria' a hushed showstopper. Side two's opener, 'Samba do Grande Amor', finds him grabbing his semi-acoustic six-string bass guitar to lay down a subtle, yet heavy, samba groove, the electric instrument's deep and sweet tone a wonderful foil to Silberstein's perfectly judged nylon and electric guitar work throughout, while Boccato is equally on point with his impeccable percussion on every track. Rarely has Patitucci sounded so soulful, corralling his mighty technique with the kind of perfectly weighted artistic intent only the most mature musicians can achieve. **Mike Flynn**

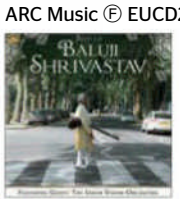
World Music

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Baluji Shrivastav

Best of Baluji Shrivastav

ARC Music Ⓕ EUCD2695



British-Indian composer Baluji Shrivastav is an outsider where Indian music is concerned. A multi-instrumentalist, he plays sitar as well as surbahar (bass sitar), dilruba, (a string instrument played with a bow), pakhavaj (the ancient barrel-shaped drum) as well as tabla. Blinded in childhood, he could not be trained in the traditional way, in which a disciple is required to do chores for the guru. Largely self-taught, he established the Baluji Music Foundation to encourage people with disabilities to participate in music. These tracks offer many musical flavours including the Arabic classic 'Diggy Diggy Diggy ya Rababa' and favourite Afghani song 'Chashm-e-Siah Dari'. The compositions are equally intriguing, particularly the bluesy sounding 'Journey to Sedna', while 'Fruit', by Shrivastav's wife Linda Shanovitch, combines Latin American rhythms with Indian instruments. But Indian classical music remains at the core of this disc and 'Raga Dhani' introduces us to the many nuances of the dilruba and perfectly evokes the pre-dusk mood of this raga: it's a track you'll want to play over and over again. **Jameela Siddiqi**

Tunde Jegede & Derek Gripper

Mali in Oak

Globe Music Ⓕ GM-003



In 2015 kora and cello player Tunde Jegede and South African guitarist Derek Gripper played a candlelit concert as a duet at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse at London's Shakespeare's Globe Theatre as part of a series of performances curated by guitarist John Williams. Gripper's remarkable transpositions of 21-string kora music for the six-string guitar have been much praised in *Songlines*. It was the only concert in the series in which Williams did not join the performers on stage. Feeling that even his virtuosity had nothing to add to their stringed magic, he sat in the audience and marvelled. This collaboration features repertoire from both musicians. Their duets are as elegant and graceful as you would expect, but the most extraordinary thing is that it's almost impossible to tell which notes are coming from which instrument. Jegede's cello on 'Songs of the Eternal' adds a different texture and their one joint composition, 'Where Rivers Meet', leaves the listener hoping their collaboration will flower further. **Nigel Williamson**

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MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

Madrigals ancient and modern launch a pair of parallel century-hopping musical journeys

Ten early madrigals

A journey through Italian madrigals reveals a slow transformation from introverted, reflective styles to declamatory, quasi-operatic scenes. The intimate 'barbershop' sound of The King's Singers suits early works particularly well, especially **Arcadelt**'s subtly erotic setting of a swan song. This sense of intimacy is transformed by the young Monteverdi's almost claustrophobic **Baci soave, e cari** in which Les Arts Florissants bristle with energy responding to the delicate combination of text and dissonance.The Huelgas Ensemble begin Marenzio's long chromatic line in **Solo e pensoso** with an intimate, soft tone and allow the madrigal to guide them towards a sprightly, quick-witted, gesture-based style. Gesualdo's highly developed chromaticism receives sensitive performances from La Compagnia del Madrigale who in **Io parto, e non più dissi** find a sense of intrigue in fleeting details. Monteverdi's **Sfogava con le stele** simultaneously plunders sacred and secular compositional toolkits to create declamation far from the close intimacy of his earlier works. Voces Suaves find a mouth-watering balance here between freedom and restraint. By the time Monteverdi published his Fifth Book of Madrigals, **Cruda Amarilli** was already infamous for shaking the foundations of the Palestrina style. Here, dissonances appear more striking when sung so richly by Concerto Italiano with a beguiling hint of a quiver from the soprano. Perhaps the most heart-rending work of all, however, is from his Sixth Book: **Lamento d'Arianna à 5** is infused with aching beauty by the Consort of Musicke, their sound much influenced by the luminous tone of Emma Kirkby. Monteverdi's declamatory style in **La lettera amorosa** brings him close to free speech and takes the madrigal in new directions. Yet how different this free speech is across two wonderful performances: compare Cathy Berberian's grand confessional with the delicate intimacy of Montserrat Figueras. For the grandest gesture of all, though, look no further than **Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda** in which Rolando Villazón is absolutely gripping. **Edward Breen**



Les Arts Florissants' 2016 Gramophone Award-winning Monteverdi album inspired our two journeys

The madrigal: intimate, reflective and powerful music

Arcadelt Il bianco e dolce cigno King's Singers **Warner**
Monteverdi Baci soave, e cari Les Arts Florissants **LAF**
Marenzio Solo e pensoso Huelgas Ens **Sony Classical**
Gesualdo Io parto... Compagnie del Madrigale **Glossa**
Monteverdi Sfogava co... Voces Suaves **Ambronay**
Monteverdi Cruda Amarilli Concerto Italiano **Naïve**
Monteverdi Lamento d'Arianna Consort of Musicke **Deutsche Harmonia Mundi**
Monteverdi Lettera amorosa Figueras **Alia Vox**
Monteverdi Lettera amorosa Berberian **Wergo**
Monteverdi Il combattimento Villazón **Erato**

Modern madrigals

In 1884, **Gilbert and Sullivan** – trying to conjure up earlier times in *The Mikado*, as Yum-Yum faces her impending marriage – wrote a pastiche madrigal, 'Brightly dawns our wedding-day'. It's charming and works perfectly (especially when 'retro-fitted' as a real madrigal by The King's Singers!). Later generations of composers, though, used the form without irony. In 1958 **Paul Hindemith**, often drawn to earlier forms, gave us a dozen madrigals to poems by Josef Weinheber – modern in language, yet aware of their formal heritage. **Bohuslav Martinů**, too, was drawn to earlier genres and, though he wrote madrigals for voices, sometimes dispensed with the singers to create a close-textured weave of just two instruments. **György Ligeti**'s *Nonsense Madrigals* set Lewis Carroll and others to virtuoso effect, and The King's Singers (for whom they were written) do them incomparably – and with great humour. **Henri Pousseur**'s *Madrigal III* of 1962 for clarinet and five instruments employs a challenging modernist language for surprisingly rewarding results. Much easier on the ear are **Ned Rorem**'s *Four Madrigals* (1947), setting words by Sappho in a clever idiom that manages to look back to the great works of the 17th century, but with some cheeky and very 20th-century harmonies. The *Madrigali* or 'Fire Songs' by **Morten Lauridsen** (much imitated but rarely bettered) set Renaissance texts – think Monteverdi in modern garb with a splash or two of Gesualdo's spicier harmonies. **Emma Lou Diemer** (*b*1927) wrote a trio of madrigals (with piano accompaniment) to texts by Shakespeare – undemanding, melodious and clearly fun to sing. **Paul Mealor**'s madrigal settings of rose texts, very much in the modern choral idiom (à la Whitacre, Lauridsen and Ešenvalds), employ delicious harmonies to beguil the ear. And last but not least, try **Gian Francesco Malipiero**'s four-movement orchestral suite of madrigals 'after Monteverdi' – magical! **James Jolly**

Sullivan Brightly dawns our wedding day The King's Singers **RCA**
Hindemith 12 Madrigals Der Junge Chor Aachen **CPO**
Martinů Madrigals Škampa; Novák **Supraphon**
Ligeti Nonsense madrigals The King's Singers **Sony Classical**
Pousseur Madrigal III Bartholomée et al **Cyprès**
Rorem Four Madrigals Modern Madrigal Qt **Phoenix**
Lauridsen Madrigali Chamber Choir of Europe **Hänssler Classic**
Diemer Madrigals Mansfield University Choirs **Mark Records**
Mealor Madrigals on Rose Texts Tenebrae **Decca Classics**
Malipiero Madrigali Città di Prato Camerata **CPO**

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REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

Michael Gielen the Romantic

SWR's Michael Gielen Edition reaches Tchaikovsky, Berlioz and Dvořák – and makes for unmissable listening

Michael Gielen in Tchaikovsky? What, that dedicated exponent of Bruckner, Mahler and the moderns? Gielen indulging a highly demonstrative Russian Romantic? 'Indulging' is just what he doesn't do, which is why Vol 4 of SWR Music's **Michael Gielen Edition** (recordings dating from 1968 to 2014) is in many respects even more revelatory than the first three. Much of the material has never been released before, either on CD or in any other format, and the recordings emanate from various international venues, the sound invariably warm and luminous rather than sharply focused.

We're given Gielen's intense but tear-free accounts of Tchaikovsky's Fourth and Sixth Symphonies. The *Pathétique* is pretty fierce, the apex of the first movement's development section driven home with passion but without ceremony (no disruptive distending of tempo here), the finale all the more heart-breaking for its interpretative directness. While not the sort of well-drilled, hot-off-the-stove reading we have from Mravinsky on DG (or Muti on Warner), great as those are, Gielen offers us a performance that is altogether rougher-hewn. The Fourth is something else and if I'd had it to hand when I prepared my recent BBC Radio 3 'Building a Library' survey of the symphony it would without doubt have been among my top three or four choices. My reasons? Gielen projects the first movement without compromise, with no unmarked hairpin dynamics (a vice that many of his younger rivals seem addicted to), minimal tempo variation and a palpable sense of urgency. In the *Andantino*'s *più mosso* passage, where Tchaikovsky takes a brave albeit temporary stab at optimism, Gielen attends to counter melodies with more care and affection than I've heard from anyone since Mengelberg at the Concertgebouw in 1929.

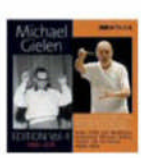
Rachmaninov is represented by *The Isle of the Dead*, where Gielen, here also at his most inspired, brings out the score's darker colours, at times suggesting unexpected parallels with Berg. Berlioz is similarly well served with a *Symphonie fantastique* where the first movement (including the repeat) is, like the parallel movement in Tchaikovsky No 4, viewed as a whole and, come the dizzying modulations towards the close of these 'Passions', the sense of emotional equivocation is all the more powerful for not being underlined by vacillating tempos. Only in the last movements, which are taken at quite a broad tempo, do we witness a marginal easing of tension.

Gielen also programmes the Berlioz Requiem, a tempered, profoundly musical reading, the 'Lacrymosa' being particularly effective, the tenor David Rendall giving his all in the 'Sanctus'. The other big choral piece included is Schumann's *Scenes from Faust* with Günter Reich on magnificent form in the principal role. Here Gielen captures the music's combination of sublimity and agitation (sample from 'Hier ist die Aussicht frei' to the end), much as he does in the overtures *Manfred* and *The Bride of Messina*, the latter a remarkable piece where Gielen's ears perk up for its many prophetic passages (the finale of Dvořák's Seventh seems to make a cameo showing from 5'14"), and Mahler's fine-tipped arrangement of Schumann's *Spring* Symphony (No 1).

As it happens the Dvořák Seventh is also included in the set, a towering performance that refuses to rush fences: for example, the *poco adagio* stretches to 11'42" whereas Kubelík's Berlin Philharmonic recording (DG) is a mere 9'46". With Gielen at the helm Brahms and Wagner are audible forebears; the Scherzo wears a rustic demeanour, and the outer movements hold their temper until the principal climaxes blaze, which they do with uncompromising force. Dvořák's Cello Concerto with Heinrich Schiff is a genuine dialogue, Schiff either digging deep into the more emphatic music or conjuring the softest *pianissimi* in, for example, the first movement's big tune. The Violin Concerto falls to its most celebrated interpreter of the 20th century, the composer's great-grandson Josef Suk, a reading that combines tonal lustre with a keen attack of the bow. Suk's grandfather (and Dvořák's son-in-law) the composer Josef Suk is represented by the 50-minute *A Summer Tale* where Gielen makes a real play for the score's variegated roster of tonal colours.

Various shorter works are also included, Weber's *Der Freischütz* Overture segueing happily into volleys of applause and Johann Strauss's *Emperor Waltz*, a recording from the Minnesota Music Festival. Weber's Second Piano Concerto is also included, with Ludwig Hoffmann as soloist. Three orchestras are involved, the SWR SO Baden-Baden and Freiburg, the Saarbrücken Radio SO and the SWR Stuttgart Radio SO, all of them delivering quality performances. Michael Gielen is the sort of conductor whose recordings provide a slow burn: not for him instant gratification, but a mass of interpretative subtleties that emerge more clearly with each successive encounter, the sort of privilege that only recordings can afford. An absolute winner.

THE RECORDINGS



Michael Gielen Edition G
Volume 4
SWR Music Ⓜ ⑨
SWR19028CD

Bruno Walter's Brahms

While reviewing Vol 3 of 'The Michael Gielen Edition' (2/17) I had cause to mention the first volume of Pristine Audio's **Bruno Walter conducts Brahms** (PASC485) which includes an emotionally charged 1951 account of the Second Symphony. Vol 2 is in many respects no less remarkable, the Second Piano Concerto with Myra Hess having already appeared on Music & Arts, a big, frequently forceful account, Hess's assertive 'animus' a fair balance for the expressive 'anima' of Walter's conducting. Not note-perfect by any means, but compelling, that's for sure. The Violin Concerto is entrusted to one of the finest violinists of the era, Erica Morini, sounding more like Adolf Busch than ever in the purity of her tone, the security of her chords and the overall classicism of her style, though an occasional tendency to play away from the note's centre can be slightly distracting. An extremely beautiful performance none the less and Walter's conducting is consistently supportive. Both symphonies are passionately played, the Third opening like a burst of sunlight, the strings and brass especially glowing. No repeat, but the transition to the development is both weighty and white-hot, the New Yorkers' lower strings almost Stokowski-like in their tonal richness. Great horns, too, at the movement's centre whereas the finale really goes some, with keen accents and, within the first minute or so, a mode of attack that verges on sounding ferocious. The Fourth too is remarkably effective, strong and vital, the return of the *Andante*'s second subject (8'23") positively sumptuous. Ever a conductor to confound expectations, here he really is on top form. Though the sound is occasionally dusty and tends to distort, Andrew Rose has given it an effective sonic wash and brush-up.

THE RECORDING



Walter conducts Brahms
Volume 2
Hess; Morini; Walter
Pristine Audio
Ⓢ ② PASC489

Vintage Lili Kraus

Lili Kraus's **Mozart** has something of Artur Schnabel's impulsiveness about it. Take the finale of the D minor Concerto No 20, K466 (with the Pro Musica Orchestra under Enrique Jorda), at around 0'55", there's that same hungry rushing of phrases. At the busy centre of the 'Romance' Kraus is careful to avoid any feeling of monotony, varying dynamics as she does throughout this programme of vintage Vox Mozart recordings. Concerto No 19 in F, K459 (Vienna SO, Rudolf Moralt) admits a certain element of grandeur that's rare in performances of this work and Moralt is a rather more accommodating Mozartian than is Jorda. The two solo piano sonatas are memorable, No 12 in F for its balance of drama and lyricism, No 11 in A for the way Kraus handles the first movement theme and variations, keeping things on the move except for the penultimate variation where she sticks to a fairly broad tempo. She went on to record the more or less complete solo piano music on two separate occasions, but these early efforts (*c*1950) are well worth hearing even though the sound quality as transferred is inconsistent.

THE RECORDING



'Lili Kraus plays Mozart'
Kraus *pf* with various artists
VoxBox Legends
Ⓢ ② CDX2 5510

Reisenberg and friends

The best performances of Carl Maria von Weber's *Grand Duo Concertante* draw as much attention to Weber's elegantly turned and at times hair-raising piano writing as to the singing clarinet top line. David Glazer and **Nadia Reisenberg** do just that and while the mono sound might not be vintage 1963 'hi-fi' it's certainly good enough to convey the musical essence of a fine, mutually communicative interpretation. The performance of Mozart's *Kegelstatt* Trio with Guarneri Quartet cellist David Soyer (again 1963) is said to be a 'rehearsal run-through', which may help explain why the players sound so utterly at ease with each other. Beethoven's *Gassenhauer* Trio is again nimble and alert and features much telling interplay. Full appreciation of the tonal vibrancy apparent in a 1952 recording of Beethoven's Piano Quartet in E flat, Op 36, with members of the Budapest Quartet (memorable in the slow movement especially) is somewhat compromised by constricted sound, and if Dvořák's Piano Quintet with the Galimir Quartet (1980) isn't quite on the same executant level – the Budapest in Beethoven is on better form – the performance none the less connects well with the score's expressive element, and the first movement's important repeat is played. Reisenberg's solo 'home' recordings date from around 1951, the *Pastoral Variations* attributed to Mozart and, especially, Liszt's *Spanish Rhapsody* both displaying the extrovert side of her personality: unbridled playing this, full of panache. Likewise Chopin's Waltz No 5 in A flat and the last of Glazunov's *Three Miniatures*, Op 42. Listen 'blind' and you could as well be eavesdropping on an unreleased recording by some musically potent big name virtuoso. As with other recordings reviewed here, you need to listen *through* the sound rather than *to* it, but that's hardly an issue given the uncommonly high quality of the music making.

THE RECORDING



Live Chamber Recitals and Home Solo Performances
Reisenberg *et al*
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Ⓜ ② 7318/19



Nadia Reisenberg: 'you could as well be eavesdropping on some big name virtuoso'

PHOTOGRAPHY: THE TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

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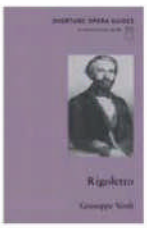
Mark Pullinger peruses the latest pocket opera guide, to Rigoletto:
'It's shocking to think that over 20 years have passed since a major studio recording of this major opera'



Liam Cagney on a broad overview of Western art music since 1989:
'A key theme is young composers' embrace of technological advances such as digitisation, sound analysis and the internet'

Rigoletto

Overture Opera Guide (series editor Gary Kahn)
Alma Classics, PB, 256pp, £12.00
ISBN 978-1-847-49626-3



The choice of Verdi's *Rigoletto* as the subject for the latest Overture Opera Guide, published in association with English National Opera, is timely, coinciding with ENO's exhumation of Jonathan Miller's iconic 'Little Italy' production. The guide follows the successful series format of chapters on the opera's historical background, a musical analysis and its performance history, before a beautifully set libretto alongside William Weaver's English translation. There are some elements of overlap between chapters, though not troublingly so. The first chapter is prefaced by a lovely collection of production shots through the ages, featuring great singers in their roles, the best being one of Tito Gobbi and Renata Scotto in a BBC television programme from 1966.

Jonathan Keates aptly sets up the atmosphere of resistance against the Austrian regime in Venice and Verdi's battles against the censors in getting his version of Victor Hugo's *Le roi s'amuse* on to the operatic stage of La Fenice. It is interesting to read how Francesco Maria Piave was faithful to the language of Hugo's play, including transferring lines such as 'Sur le lion mourant vous lâchez votre chien!' and 'Courtisans! courtisans! démons! race damnée!' Keates charts how Piave's changes included the seduction of Gilda now taking place offstage, and the final scene – originally played out in front of a crowd – now taking place alone. He also chronicles the frosty relations between Verdi and Piave, who managed to get the libretto past the censors 'without fractures or amputations'. Piave actually salvaged a lot: the Duke of Mantua could be a libertine and absolute ruler; Rigoletto could be a deformed jester; and Gilda could die in a sack. The sack proved remarkably problematic to the censors – Roger Parker suggests it was seen as 'an unnecessary lapse in taste' and George Hall notes that the final scene was often cut at Covent Garden.

Parker provides a lucid musical analysis of Verdi's score, which marked a significant breakthrough, making the point that almost every opera the composer wrote after *Rigoletto* is now part of the standard repertoire. He pinpoints ways in which it advanced Italian opera, with no introductory arias for the principal characters and no *concertato* finales. Parker picks out details in Verdi's orchestration and includes the composer's lovely description of the title character 'externally deformed and ridiculous, internally passionate and full of love'. His analysis is clear, taking us through the action chronologically, from picking out the 'curse' theme in the prelude to the flute arpeggios recalling 'Caro nome' as Gilda expires. Parker's text is cross-referenced with musical examples from a thematic guide, placed just before the libretto.

George Hall provides a preamble about the performance history of Victor Hugo's play, setting up the problems Verdi and Piave faced in adapting it. He describes the disapproval voiced by the critics after its premiere – 'a horrendous and nauseating spectacle' – and deals with its different versions under the titles *Viscardello*, *Lionello* and *Clara di Perth*. In London, too, the critical reaction was severe: it 'contains some of the very worst music we ever had the misfortune to listen to', *The Morning Post* pompously declared.

Brief descriptions of various productions are highlighted, including Doris Dörrie's *Planet of the Apes*-style production for Bavarian State Opera and Michael Mayer's Rat Pack Las Vegas staging for the Met. Jonathan Miller's staging, with the Duke as Mafia boss, gets a good deal of space, but Hall hedges his bets somewhat when describing how, after Christopher Alden's production bombed at ENO, Miller's was 'reinstated triumphantly' in the current season. The guide was published before what was – at best – a lukewarm revival in February.

The select discography is very select – no Gavazzeni (Mercury, 10/61) or Molinari-Pradelli (CfP/EMI, 9/68) – and stops at 1995. There should have been room for more than a cursory paragraph or two to discuss the merits of specific recordings and DVD versions of the opera, although a website is cited. It's shocking to think, though, that over 20 years have passed since a major studio recording of this major opera – food for thought about how the classical music recording industry has changed. **Mark Pullinger**

Music After the Fall

Modern Composition and Culture since 1989
By Tim Rutherford-Johnson
University of California Press, 368pp, PB, £24.95
ISBN: 978-0-520-28315-2



Music After the Fall aims to continue from where Paul Griffiths and Arnold Whittall's well-thumbed surveys of modern music left off, charting the terrain of composition since 1989. If that aim is ambitious, it's hard to think of a better-qualified writer, Tim Rutherford-Johnson being one of our best chroniclers of new music.

There are significant differences, though, from the Griffiths and Whittall books. Since the 'borders of what might qualify' as Western art music in the 21st century have, as Rutherford-Johnson puts it, 'become highly permeable and fuzzy', *Music After the Fall* treats not only traditional composers such as Steve Reich but more left-field musicians like Merzbow. From a structural point of view, rather than following a chronological composers-and-movements narrative, *Music After the Fall* moves freely backwards and forwards within the 1989-2016 period. Composers and styles are arranged thematically in terms of abstract



Cellist Sol Gabetta and actor Vakil Eelman performing Michel van der Aa's Up-close – discussed in Tim Rutherford-Johnson's Music After the Fall

concepts such as permission, fluidity, mobility, excess and loss. In these ways *Music After the Fall* reorientates the narrative of new music away from notated music towards art music that engages our current technological environment. A line is drawn in the sand between the post-war and the post-1989 traditions.

The opening chapter, 'Mediation and the Marketplace', sets the scene by looking at the unexpected commercial success of spiritual minimalism. Spiritual minimalism's rise was achieved not in the concert hall but through recordings and film. This showed record labels in the early 1990s that, among the listening public, a taste existed for 'music in such mediated forms and a style of music that was easily susceptible to such forms of mediation'. Spiritual minimalism was particularly amenable to radio and video media since it does not depend on hearing what came before: we can simply drop in at any point in a piece and enjoy it. To some extent this set the agenda for new music, and composition is accordingly now considered in terms of a wider media 'ecosystem'. Rutherford-Johnson shows well how ensembles like Bang on a Can and promotors like Nonclassical have responded to this situation to foster new audiences.

The book's key theme in terms of composition itself is young composers' embrace of technological advances such as digitisation, sound analysis and the internet. A colourful range of works are described that 'could hardly have been imagined before the advent of digital technology' – works like Michel van der Aa's *Up-close*, a hybrid video opera/cello concerto, Nigel Helyer's *GeneMusiK*, which uses DNA sequencing to compose melodies, and Cassandra Miller's *Guide*, a choral work part generated from a digital analysis of an old blues recording. We also get bracing accounts of topics like acoustic ecology, the globalisation of new music (composers from the Middle East and Asia), musical responses to 9/11, massed works such as Sciarrino's *Il cerchio tagliato dei suoni* for 104 flutes, and journey music such as Cynthia Zaven's *The Untuned Piano Concerto*, in which the piano is installed on the back of a truck and driven around New Delhi while the composer plays it. Such outer-limits stuff can at times read like science fiction, but in bringing together so many strands Rutherford-Johnson contributes to our understanding of what it all might mean.

One consequence of Rutherford-Johnson's treating 1989 as year zero is that composers such as Rihm, Saariaho, Murail, Barry, Aphergis and Manoury don't get a look in. These slightly more mainstream European composers wear the mantle of the post-war tradition, which Rutherford-Johnson doesn't seek to engage. A more contentious absence might be the general lack of score examples and musical analysis, and discussions of works by Boulez and Lachenmann are somewhat hampered by this omission. That we do occasionally get score examples for younger composers such as Aaron Cassidy and Ellen Fullman suggests that the publishers' fee for reproductions might have been an issue.

Music After the Fall is at its best when engaging the leading figures in the 21st-century avant-garde. There are illuminating passages on Peter Ablinger (these days one of the most often heard names in European art music), Jennifer Walshe and Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf. Scores by so-called New Complexity composers such as Mahnkopf and Ferneyhough are intentionally impossible for performers to realise in a *Werktreue* sense. 'The excess of notational detail introduces a different kind of unfaithfulness,' Rutherford-Johnson explains. 'Multiple, even contradictory layers of information require a constant negotiation between performer and score that does not permit casual deferral to "the composer's intentions".' In passages such as these – and there are many of them – *Music After the Fall* succeeds, faced with a bewildering range of styles, in showing us how to approach the at times forbidding terrain of contemporary music. **Liam Cagney**

PHOTOGRAPHY: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

Classics RECONSIDERED





Mark Pullinger and **David Gutman** reassess the merits of Mariss Jansons's Chandos recording of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 5



Tchaikovsky

Symphony No 5

Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra / Mariss Jansons

Chandos Ⓕ CHAN8351

With speeds fast but never breathless and with the most vivid recording yet given to this favourite symphony, this is as exciting an account as we have had since Ashkenazy's warm and sympathetic reading on Decca with the Philharmonia.

As well as Chief Conductor of the Oslo orchestra, Jansons is also the current conductor of the Leningrad Philharmonic, and nowhere does the link with Mravinsky emerge more clearly than in the finale, where he adopts a tempo very nearly as hectic as Mravinsky's on his two classic recordings. In his 1961 stereo account, unlike the earlier mono, Mravinsky made the result too breathless, where here Jansons screws up the excitement without ever making it a scramble. In the first movement he resists any temptation to linger, preferring to press the music on, and as with Ashkenazy the result sounds totally idiomatic. It has less charm, but remains a spontaneous-sounding performance. In the slow movement Jansons again prefers a steady tempo, but treats the second theme with delicate *rubato* and builds the climaxes steadily, not rushing his fences, building the final one even bigger than the first. Unlike Ashkenazy he does not allow himself an agogic hesitation for emphasis at the very peak, but his straightness makes for comparable power. He is not so light as Ashkenazy in the waltz but similar in his freshness, while in the finale – where it is striking that he follows Tchaikovsky's notated slowings rather than allowing extra *rallentandos* – the bravura of the performance finds its natural culmination.

The Oslo string ensemble is fresh and bright and superbly disciplined, while the wind soloists are generally excellent with an attractively furry-toned but not at all wobbly or whiny horn solo in the slow movement. The Chandos sound lives up to the extremely high reputation of that company, very specific and well focused.

Edward Greenfield March 1985

Mark Pullinger Cards on the table. It happens quite often that your first recording of a work is the one you return to with some affection, yet despite Mariss Jansons's Oslo Philharmonic recording of Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony being the first to grace my collection as a teenager, it wasn't a recording – or a work – I immediately fell in love with. Perhaps that's because I purchased the complete Chandos box-set rather than the individual releases and symphonies like the Fourth made a greater impact. It took Mravinsky's Fifth and – especially – Gergiev's electrifying live performance with the Vienna Philharmonic for me to become gripped. In his review, Edward Greenfield reminds us of Mariss Jansons's experience working as Evgeny Mravinsky's assistant at the Leningrad Philharmonic – but this is a very different reading, isn't it?

David Gutman It's funny you hear it that way. For me it's rather similar to the stereo Mravinsky – probably the one that I go back to the most – except that everything is a notch cooler and cleaner and of course the sound is that much more modern. The finale may be less frenzied but otherwise I hear a basically similar, 'classical' impulse behind both.

MP I'd agree about it being cooler and cleaner. There's a classical directness – an unfussiness – about the first movement. After that cloudy, fateful clarinet introduction, Jansons sets off the *Allegro con anima* at a purposeful pace, where Mravinsky and, in particular, Gergiev make it slightly more of a trudge.

DG Jansons even gets the clarinets to ape a flattened, specifically Soviet sonority to some degree as the music gets underway and the explosive brass later on can't have been the norm in Oslo!

MP Jansons certainly draws a very Russian sound from his Oslo band. I love the burnished warmth that Jansons gets from his strings, especially his cellos and basses. I reviewed him twice conducting *The Queen of Spades* in recent years, live with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and on disc with the Bavarian RSO, and those are still qualities he draws from, frankly, greater orchestras.

DG I've just unearthed a *Musical Times* review of the Oslo Philharmonic's 1986 Edinburgh Festival appearance in which the critic refers to it as 'in many ways a scratchy orchestra – harsh woodwind and far from unanimous strings' so someone was doing an ace job at the sessions, the recording cleverly compensating for any shallowness of tone in the bass.

MP Far from scratchy here! Jansons is scrupulous in his dynamic gradations in the strings. The *stringendo* in the first movement (from 5'45") is wonderfully controlled, though it never threatens to spill into anything wilder. It's a little too



Mariss Jansons launched the first major Tchaikovsky cycle of the digital age with this version of the Fifth

purposeful and briskly efficient. I enjoy the Oslo brass interjections later on though.

DG It can be argued that Jansons is paying more attention to the overall structure than traditional romantics like Riccardo Muti or Leonard Bernstein who don't wait for Tchaikovsky's written promptings to change gear. But authenticity has its limits. While Jansons's first movement introduction is much less lugubrious than it can be, in the second subject of the *Allegro* proper he trades old-style emotive swellings for subtler distortions of his own: I am thinking of those *subito piano* dynamic adjustments. On the positive side his cleanly etched phrasing does give the movement a refreshed character. Jansons will have noticed that this is Tchaikovsky's only major orchestral work after the Third Symphony to exclude percussion other than timpani and I think he gets the 'classical' response he's aiming for.

MP That 'cleanly etched phrasing' is certainly evident in the string-playing in the *Andante cantabile* second movement. Here, the Oslo first horn has a golden, rounded tone – no hint of wobbly Soviet brass at all! The woodwind playing, too, is remarkably smooth and well-blended, but I find it a little bland and characterless. The climaxes are impressively sculpted, but I prefer something with more emotional intensity. Jansons's later recording of the Fifth (a live account with the BRSO) has much more tension here, an exciting ebb and flow.

DG I'm inclined to agree with you about the second movement though I don't think I've ever heard a Jansons remake that represented an improvement on his first thoughts! I was actually least happy with the third movement which to my ears almost qualifies as dull; the waltzing is too charmless for ballet yet lacks any pretence at symphonic weight. It's very disciplined… and that's about it.

MP Thoroughly drilled, but where's the joy? Jansons's pasteurised woodwinds don't evoke any character in the central section, whereas Mravinsky's are garrulous and witty. And Gergiev allows his Vienna winds much more freedom to be playful.

DG The finale goes better but I'm not sure about the 'natural culmination' EG hears there, possibly because I've never quite come to terms with the music.

MP There are two ways in which I feel the finale can be interpreted. Is it a triumphant victory over fate, or stoic resignation that fate cannot be defeated? For me, Mravinsky is in the former camp, driving the movement along thrillingly (the lacerating Leningrad brass helps!). Gergiev's timpani pound away the fate theme ominously; this feels – to me – like a hollow victory, an 'our business is rejoicing' mood, which moves me greatly. So what does Jansons do? EG writes that Jansons 'screws up the excitement without ever making it a scramble'. It's little surprise that he steers a middle path which, although impressively played, doesn't especially move me.

Take the *ritenuto molto* (bar 468) as an example. Mravinsky pulls up long beforehand and ratchets up the tension. Gergiev gets his timps to swell outrageously – a real man of the theatre – but Jansons, unsurprisingly, plays it exactly by the book. Does this make Jansons a 'safe' library recommendation? Do we want 'safe' in Tchaikovsky's Fifth?

DG It's not entirely fair to characterise Jansons as 'safe' given that representatives of the Russian-Soviet school (of whatever precise ethnicity) were expected to take the main body of the movement much more swiftly than marked. Jansons doesn't disappoint there and his linear sweep never falters. Isn't it more that we shouldn't look to him if it's risky, unhinged passion we're after? To paraphrase EG in another, Beethovenian context, this is, perhaps, a Fifth 'to live with', one that brings the music closer to the first three symphonies than the *Manfred* or the *Pathétique*.

MP I'm all for 'risky, unhinged passion' in Tchaikovsky! There is a great deal of consistency in approach across Jansons's entire cycle though and he makes a strong case for those earlier symphonies.

DG I never owned the Chandos set but have vivid memories of Jansons conducting Tchaikovsky with the then BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra on TV. His ability to transform almost every aspect of the playing of a less-than-stellar ensemble still seems to me the most remarkable thing about him. Like you, perhaps I'm not always so convinced by his interpretations and wonder to what extent this recording's remarkable combination of sonic openness and instrumental clarity is what really wowed listeners in the mid-1980s and made the Chandos series such a success.

MP There's a lot of truth in that. This was the first significant cycle of the digital era. It deserves the accolades it received both for Chandos's sound – though slightly too reverberant for me – and for the results Jansons draws from a less-than-top-rank orchestra. I'm just not sure Jansons's Fifth is necessarily the pick of his cycle.

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

Music of the forest

From solo guitar music to opera via a jazz-inflected contemporary vocal work, **Andrew Mellor** explores music on the theme of forests – whether preoccupied by their danger, mystery, magic, nature or otherwise

Charles Baudelaire referred to 'forests of symbols' in his poem 'Correspondances', as if dizzied by the plethora of symbolism attached to woods. Sometimes that symbolism is prescribed in detail by strands of psychoanalytical thought: the forest as the mother to all forms of life, the forest as femininity in the eyes of the male youth. Sometimes the alignment is more broad and obvious: the realm of the unknown, a hideout for all the most dangerous and fascinating terrors of the unconscious.

In that sense, the forest is a place where we may come to know ourselves better. It is the place where we might learn the lessons of life, where we might transform – or transfigure – the threshold to maturity, love or even death. There is opportunity within. But there is magic, beauty and spirituality too. The forest was, and occasionally still is, a place of worship, sacrifice and offering – the domain of gods and shamans as well as rogues, bandits and critters.

Those critters may add to the mystery of the forest even though, paradoxically, they are rational, scientific entities. In that sense, perhaps the most alluring and teasing element of the forest is its terrifying concentration of nature – from disorientating trees and curious light to creatures of odd gait and voice. What is most real is most frightening.

Composers have long explored the forest's sense of darkness and fright, and often in an operatic context. Some have delved into Jungian forest psychology, exploring the possibilities of transformation in a way that can only be achieved in music. Others have remembered that at one time the Continent was itself largely forest – and therefore, in effect, a natural home for us all.



'Winter' by Paul King (1867-1947) captures the eerie stillness, the inertia of the forest, that Sibelius himself explores in Tapiola

PHOTOGRAPHY: SUPERSTOCK/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



Geminiani

La foresta incantata
CBC Vancouver Orchestra / John Eliot Gardiner
CBC Records

Geminiani's incidental music for a production of *La forest enchantée* (a pantomime based on a scene from Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*) at the Théâtre des Tuileries, Paris (1754), wound up as this attractive two-part multi-movement suite with the bustle of a *concerto grosso* (especially in this recording). Geminiani doesn't do musical description like Vivaldi, but the trees peer through his evocative use of woodwinds, his pastoral effects and his occasional conjuring of mystery.



Takemitsu

In the Woods
Marco Del Greco *gtr*
Neos

Takemitsu turned to one of his most treasured instruments for his last work, composed in hospital in 1995. *In the Woods* is a trilogy of American and Canadian forestscapes for solo guitar, including 'Muir Woods' – inspired by a forest of unusually tall trees in a San Francisco suburb – written for Julian Bream. 'It is...music of extraordinary stillness, music that dissolves gently into silence,' Bream has said of the piece – and Del Greco captures that dissolution here.



Liszt

Waldesrauschen, S145 No 1
Nelson Freire *pf*
Decca (8/11)

Liszt's idea of 'forest murmurs' in this short but charming concert study from 1862 proves very different from those of associated composers Wagner and Humperdinck. Here, Liszt's noises of the forest are idealised, beautiful figurations ripe for 'Romantic' transformation into something almost heroic. The composer hears no danger in his wood, but he appears to believe in nature's ability to transform and embolden – certainly under Nelson Freire's fingers, anyway.



Chabrier

Sous-bois
Vienna Philharmonic / John Eliot Gardiner
DG (10/96)

Chabrier composed 10 *Pièces pittoresques* for piano in 1880-81 and later orchestrated four of them into his *Suite pastorale*. One of the four, 'Sous-bois' ('Undergrowth'), is far more remarkable than it can first appear. It foreshadows Sibelius's *Tapiola* with its sense of inbuilt inertia, of the stillness of the forest, while also constantly moving (and modulating – unlike *Tapiola*). Something dark lurks under Gardiner's view of Chabrier's treetop canopy.



Tarkiainen

Into the Woodland Silence
Aili Ikonen *sgr* Norrbotten Big Band / Outi Tarkiainen
Fredriksson Music

As total silence doesn't really exist, the extreme quiet of the forest is perhaps the most beautiful silence there is. Sibelius knew that, and so does the ever fascinating Finnish composer Outi Tarkiainen (*b* 1985), whose fusion of silence and music, as well as jazz and classical idioms, draws on her Lapland roots and on the mystery and melancholy of life in the north. There, the forest is more about everyday reality and survival than it is about philosophy and psychology.



Debussy

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune
Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Stéphane Denève
Chandos (8/12)

The poem by Mallarmé on which Debussy based his seminal orchestral score has only passing references to the forest in which the faun awakes. But in Debussy's score, the forest is as much a protagonist as the creature itself, mostly as the suggestion of colour, light and humidity was so ideal for the composer's language of harmonic and textural transience. In this SACD recording you hear the forest breathe and glisten.



Humperdinck

Hänsel und Gretel
Sols, Tölz Boys' Choir, Bavarian RSO / Jeffrey Tate
Warner Classics (11/90)

Forest metaphors don't come much clearer than in the Brothers Grimm's coming-of-age fairy tale *Hänsel und Gretel*. Humperdinck relishes the opportunities posed by the dark, disorientating wood with its 'guzzling witch' in his ultra-vivid opera. But there's deep subtlety in Humperdinck's score, too (particularly in the woody domain conjured up in this recording), which picks up where Wagner's 'Forest Murmurs' (*Siegfried*) left off. Tate's interpretation is particularly evocative.



Weir

Forest
BBC Symphony Orchestra / Martyn Brabbins
NMC (8/08)

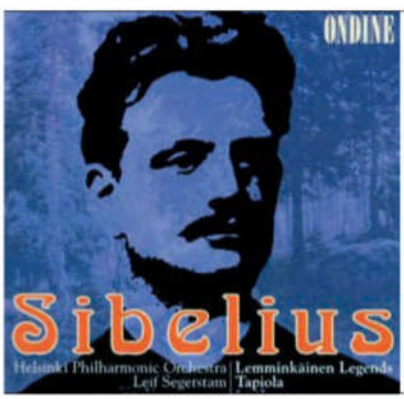
Like Hänsel and his sister, Judith Weir found herself 'pressing deeper and deeper into a mysterious prospect of trees' as she worked on *Forest* – a piece for large orchestra – in 1995. The composer has also described how she sensed the score flowering organically almost by itself, and we hear this in the tangling, intertwining lines that under Brabbins's watchful eye thicken up in this complex and involving piece.



Schoenberg

Verklärte Nacht
Lausanne CO / Heinz Holliger
Zig-Zag Territoires (2/14)

The events of *Verklärte Nacht* – envisioned in Richard Dehmel's poem and described in Schoenberg's sextet (heard here in the string-orchestra version) – are saturated with the forest's mystery and magic, especially in this translucent performance. Schoenberg tells of the curious forest light (using harmonics and stretched scoring – much as Sibelius does), but the essence of his wood is its capacity to host profound transformation, a reflection of the composer's exceptional way with tonality in 1899.



Sibelius

Tapiola
Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra / Leif Segerstam Ondine (7/96)

Sibelius's depiction of the 'northlands dusky forests' was his last major work. It has one key, one theme, and is more concerned with inertia than movement; in the words of the musicologist Glenda Dawn Goss, the composer 'reduced his music more and more until, in the end, there was none'. The score is so effective precisely because of its ambiguity – what it doesn't do. Things happen in *Tapiola*, but we can never quite be sure of what they are, even if we do surely hear the essence of light and wind (this is where Segerstam excels). The score's final descent into the major, the forest turned friend, tells us why Sibelius built his villa Ainola in the woods.

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Brahms's Serenade No 1 in D

Beneath its genial surface, the composer's first purely orchestral work is rich in emotional complexity and rife with interpretative puzzles. **Andrew Farach-Colton** discusses its vast and varied discography



Brahms's D major Serenade, Op 11, was initially conceived in 1857-58 as a nonet (or octet, perhaps) for winds and strings. Sadly, we have no definitive record of the music's genesis, as the composer was in the habit of destroying any evidence of his works in progress. All that we know has been gleaned from correspondence. We know, for instance, that there were originally four movements, to which two more were added: an expansive, lyrical *scherzo* and a gentle minuet. We also know that it was his friend and mentor Joseph Joachim who discerned a 'symphonic character' in the music, and urged Brahms to pursue this. Joachim conducted a version for 'small orchestra' in Hamburg in 1859, and that experience appears to have convinced Brahms that a still larger canvas was required. At one point he seriously considered changing the title to Symphony, then settled on the hybrid Symphony-Serenade; but when the final, full-orchestra version was premiered in Hanover on March 3, 1860 – again, under Joachim's direction – the original title had been reinstated. It was published later that same year as Serenade 'for large orchestra', Op 11.

Michael Steinberg believed that if Brahms had called it a symphony, 'we would be hearing it all the time'. But the composer's hesitation is quite understandable. Just 26 at the time of the premiere, Brahms was a fast-rising star of German music. Schumann had hailed him as a genius. Expectations were high, Beethoven's shadow loomed large, and to write a symphony was to invite comparison. In Eduard Hanslick's predominantly enthusiastic review of the Serenade's Viennese premiere in 1862, he noted that although the dimensions of Brahms's work surpassed those of most symphonies, it was not filled with the kind of 'passionate struggles and sublime pathos' that Beethoven had infused into the form. The serenade, according to Hanslick, had more modest aims, as 'the playground of idyllic dreams, of beloved thoughts, of lightness and gaiety'. Brahms's work, to Hanslick's ears, was a 'symphony of tranquillity'.

That the Op 11 Serenade abounds with bucolic charm is without question, yet the score is not nearly as straightforward as it may seem, and beneath its 'tranquil' surface run veins rich with emotional complexity. Brahms was relatively sparing in his markings, which gives performers a lot of leeway, and the few instructions that are provided can often surprise. For example, Brahms marks the opening movement *Allegro molto* with a time signature of *alla breve*. If one takes the composer at his word, it should actually sound more ebullient than idyllic.

THE RECORDINGS

Ebullient is certainly how the Serenade comes across in a 1935 broadcast by **Arturo Toscanini** and the New York Philharmonic. The first few minutes sound breathlessly euphoric, then Toscanini relaxes into the yearning second subject, allowing it to breathe and sing while maintaining a sure sense of forward motion. This change in tempo is unmarked, though such flexibility would have been expected in the performance practice of the composer's era (Toscanini



Brahms in 1860, the same year his final, full-orchestra version of the Serenade was premiered

PHOTOGRAPHY: BRAHMS-INSTITUT AN DER MUSIKHOCHSCHULE LÜBECK

was seven at the time of the Serenade's premiere). From beginning to end, in fact, Toscanini observes every one of Brahms's directives, and his pliant approach to tempo belies his reputation as being iron-fisted. The first of the two *scherzos*, for instance, feels very much like an *Allegro non troppo* should – flowing easily without any pushing. And although the recording is primitive, one can clearly hear how the orchestra respects Brahms's instruction to play *piano e dolce*, deepening the music's enigmatic quality.

Hermann Abendroth is similarly flexible in a 1953 radio recording with the Berlin RSO, though the emotional temperature of his reading is considerably cooler, most noticeably in the central *Adagio non troppo*. Abendroth breezes through as if Brahms had marked it *andante con moto*, whereas Toscanini tenderly feels his way through with a hesitancy that reveals its vulnerability. The first studio recording came from French HMV and **André Vandernoot**, a vividly characterised (though cavernous-sounding) 1957 account with the Orchestra of the Paris Conservatoire. Vandernoot's wild tempo fluctuations in the first movement always serve expressive ends, and his sublimely rapturous reading of the *Adagio* is some 60 per cent slower than Abendroth's, and worth every minute. It's the kind of daring, unapologetically romantic interpretation one might expect from **Leopold Stokowski**. But, alas, Stokowski's own 1960 studio recording is surprisingly rigid and joyless. There's intensity of a sort, thanks to the ardent playing of Symphony of the Air, but it's not enough to do the music justice.

In some respects, **Heinz Bongartz**'s implacably placid reading with the Dresden Philharmonic (1962) gets closer to the music's heart than does Stokowski's. It's practically Brucknerian in its pacing (the *Allegro molto* frankly cannot be described as such, and the *Adagio* is the slowest on record), but whatever the performance lacks in vitality, at least there's obvious warmth and affection. Perhaps Bongartz simply shared Hanslick's view of the work as a 'symphony of tranquillity'. His version is also slightly preferable to either of **Günter Wand**'s two recordings, both from Cologne. Wand's first, with the Gürzenich Orchestra in 1964 (nla; Club Français du Disque), sounds dogged and dour; the second, with the city's Radio Symphony Orchestra in 1968, has some occasional *gemütlich* moments but mostly gives off a perfunctory air.

There's nothing perfunctory about **István Kertész**'s now-classic Decca recording (1967), in which he audibly



'Ear-opening clarity': Charles Mackerras conducts the SCO in a period-meets-modern recording

galvanises the LSO, rivalling Toscanini's verve. He swaggers through the Trio of the first *scherzo*, and revels in the rumbustiousness of the second *scherzo*, with fizzy strings and rousing horns that create a marvellous call and response effect. The slow movement is rapt, the Menuetto tinged with melancholy, and the repetitive dotted rhythms of the finale are held taut to satisfying effect. Even now, 50 years on, the sound is impressive for its vivid presence (some rough splices aside). The thrill of the recording is its completeness – that rare alchemy of conductor, orchestra and audio engineering that coalesces to capture the very essence of the music's youthful vitality.

The first version to challenge Kertész's in sonic splendour was the exquisitely engineered Philips recording by **Bernard Haitink** and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra (1976). A different chemistry is at work here, however, with polish and refinement replacing colour and vibrancy. Haitink is a self-effacing guide, and the draw here ultimately has less to do with Brahms and more to do with the RCO's elegant virtuosity. The pros and cons of this low-voltage account are encapsulated in the finale, where the conductor's sluggish tempo is kept buoyant by rhythmic precision and variety of articulation.

Much the same could be said for a pair of 1981 recordings by **Claudio Abbado** and **Kurt Masur**, which are notable primarily for the excellence of their orchestral playing. Abbado's interpretation (the first of two for DG) is somewhat more supple and emotionally generous than Haitink's, and despite the glare of early digital technology, the Berlin Philharmonic sound glorious. Masur's relaxed approach seems to suit the mellow, burnished tone of Leipzig's Gewandhaus Orchestra, and his affectionate attention to detail provides pleasure. The finale steps very lightly, for example, yet it's not so gentle that the element of rustic jollity is forgotten. One is grateful, too, that Philips's engineers didn't jump so quickly on the digital bandwagon, as the warmth and clarity of the analogue recording are beyond reproach.

Jiří Bělohlávek's 1994 recording would be nothing special but for the playing of the Czech Philharmonic. Bělohlávek drives through the first *scherzo* as if in an SUV when greater economy is wanted, and the *Adagio* is sluggish. But the sound of the orchestra has so much character – those plangent oboes, reedy clarinets, vibrato-y horns and creamy strings – that one can't help but feel entranced.

A DISAPPOINTING BATCH

Considering some of the great European orchestral traditions, it's curious that the Vienna Philharmonic have yet to record this serenade, especially given how many times they've recorded the Brahms symphonies. We do, however, have a lovely 1982 account by the city's second orchestra, the Vienna Symphony, under the Israeli conductor **Gary Bertini**. In purely musical terms, Bertini's interpretation is more engaging than those from Berlin, Amsterdam, Leipzig and Prague. Bertini's flexible approach to tempo feels natural and unforced, and the orchestra plays with real feeling. If only the quiet passages were a bit quieter. Perhaps the fault lies with the dry acoustic and indifferent engineering; but whatever the reason, it a performance that doesn't quite fulfil its promise.

Other interpretations are even more frustrating. **Alexander Rahbari**'s indifferently played and poorly edited 1990 account with a Belgian radio and TV orchestra is workaday at best. In 1996, Alun Francis presses too hard with what sounds like an already overstrained Milanese Giuseppe Verdi Symphony Orchestra (nla; Arte Nova). Both of these are budget versions, so one's expectations might not have been high to begin with. Then we have **Riccardo Muti**, who in 1993 succeeds in bringing out the Haydnesque aspects of Brahms's score but is sorely lacking in tenderness. In his second recording (2006), **Claudio Abbado** (now with the superb Mahler Chamber Orchestra) gives us a bearded, world-weary Brahms instead of the clean-shaven, wide-eyed youth who wrote the work.

HISTORIC CHOICE

New York Philharmonic / Toscanini

Guild Ⓢ ② GHCD2337/8

Euphoric and almost improvisatory in its freedom of tempo, this captures Toscanini at his peak. The crumbly sound quality is problematic, but the maestro's spiritual connection with this youthful masterpiece is unmistakable.

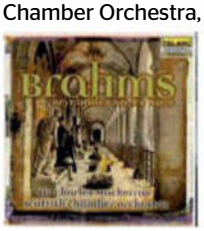


LUCID CHOICE

Scottish Chamber Orchestra / Mackerras

Telarc Ⓕ CD80522

Ear-opening clarity from the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, who employ period techniques on modern instruments. From tender intimacy to rollicking rusticity, this interpretation is brilliantly characterised and superbly recorded.



PLAIN-SPOKEN CHOICE

Ulster Orchestra / Handley

Chandos Ⓜ CHAN8612

Handley's unaffected eloquence has surprising affective power. There's nothing wild or in-your-face about this performance. It unfolds naturally, drawing one easily into the heart of the score through its graceful, elegant music-making.



PHOTOGRAPHY: MARY ROBERT/LEBRECHT MUSIC & ARTS

In 1989, Francesco d'Avalos's compelling lyrical impulses count for naught as he somehow makes the venerable Philharmonia Orchestra sound like a provincial band (nla; ASV, 9/91). **Robin Ticciati** (2010) gets very fine playing from the Bamberg Symphony, at least, although his interpretation leans so heavily on the downbeats that at times it can feel like an assault. In the same year, **Grzegorz Nowak** offers an unlikely and disconcerting mixture of rhythmic flexibility and under-inflected phrasing in a session with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra that sounds very much like a rehearsal. And three years later, eminent Brahmsian **Augustin Dumay** pushes and pulls the Kansai Philharmonic Orchestra in a manner that is more distracting than revelatory.

But, after Stokowski, the biggest musical disappointment in this survey comes from Sir **Adrian Boult**, who bolts through the score with the LPO (1977/78). Only the Menuetto is allowed to breathe; the rest is a mad dash. Boult seems not to care that Brahms bothered to add the *non troppo* modifier to the *Allegro* of the first *scherzo*, for example, and the *Adagio* is not even *andante*, but more *allegretto*. Forget about any notion of *dolce* or any subtlety of inflection, either. Boult could be a plain-spoken interpreter, but such cold impatience is perplexing from one who was usually so consistent.

'BALM' AFTER THE STORM

It's an absolute balm to turn from Boult to **Vernon Handley**, whose 1988 Chandos recording is utterly unaffected and unfailingly graceful. The Ulster Orchestra have a few awkward moments, and the reverberant acoustic smudges some detail, but the sheer, selfless musicality of this interpretation is a marvel. The first *scherzo* is as mysteriously atmospheric as one could wish, and the flowing *Adagio* evokes the 'Scene by the Brook' from Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony – glinting sun and all. A decade later, two other British conductors seemed to take Handley's lead. In 1998, Sir **Andrew Davis**, by emphasising the score's structural solidity and Classical poise, gives the Serenade the semblance of a symphony. In the same year, **James Loughran** is more of a charmer, and (as with Handley) the gentle swing and quiet intensity of his performance with the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra has unexpected cumulative impact. Not that such understated eloquence is unique to Britons: a live recording by **Wolfgang Sawallisch** and the Philadelphia Orchestra from 2006 displays similar naturalness and grace, despite patches of rough ensemble.



'Plain-speaking': Handley gets to the score's heart

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

Happily, there are myriad ways to get to the heart of Brahms's score. Mahler once said that a symphony 'must be like the world' and 'embrace everything'. In his recording with the LSO in 1989, **Michael Tilson Thomas** appears to apply this directly to the Serenade. The opening movement begins passionately, yet how delicate and Mendelssohnian the development section is. There's even a quiet passage halfway through the *Adagio* that evokes a lonely Mahlerian soundscape, and then the finale goes like the wind (though not nearly as rushed as Boult). The LSO played with greater focus for Kertész, but this is a thrilling performance. Leon Botstein takes a compellingly dramatic view, too, though the American SO is not nearly so adroit (1993 – nla; Vanguard). Still, there's an imagination and expressive power at work that's worth exploring.

Listeners who feel Brahms should be beautiful above all else might take to Leonard Slatkin's 1986 recording (nla; RCA, 4/88). Slatkin's obvious affection for the music borders on the devotional. His *Adagio* recalls Bongartz's in its breadth, though it's phrased so sensitively it almost convinces. It's impossible not to be swayed by Slatkin's detailed shading of the first

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE / ARTISTS		RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1935	New York PO / **Toscanini**	Guild Ⓢ ② GHCD2337/8 (6/08)
1953	Berlin RSO / **Abendroth**	Music & Arts Ⓕ ② CD1038 (12/99)
1957	Paris Conservatoire Orch / **Vandernoot**	BnF Collection Ⓢ ⊳ (6/58R)
1960	Sym of the Air / **Stokowski**	DG Ⓢ ② 477 6502GOM2
1962	Dresden PO / **Bongartz**	Brilliant Ⓢ ② 95073; Ⓢ (58 discs) 94860
1967	LSO / **Kertész**	Decca Ⓢ ⑫ 478 6420DC12; Decca Eloquence Ⓢ ④ ELQ480 4839 (5/68R)
1968	Cologne RSO / **Wand**	Profil Ⓜ PH05041
1976	RCO / **Haitink**	Decca Ⓢ ⑦ 478 2365DB7; Ⓢ (36 discs) 478 6360DB36 (2/78R, 9/94R)
1977/78	LPO / **Boult**	EMI/Warner Ⓜ ⊳ 365229-2
1981	BPO / **Abbado**	DG Ⓜ ② 477 5424GTA2 (5/97R)
1981	Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch / **Masur**	Philips Eloquence Ⓑ ELQ442 8298; Pentatone Ⓕ SACD PTC5186 188
1982	Vienna SO / **Bertini**	Orfeo Ⓑ ② C008 102A (6/90)
1988	Ulster Orch / **Handley**	Chandos Ⓜ ⊳ CHAN8612 (11/89R)
1989	LSO / **Tilson Thomas**	Sony Ⓕ SBK89899 (1/91R)
1990	BRT PO, Brussels / **Rahbari**	Naxos Ⓜ 8 550280 (1/92); Ⓜ 8 553227
1992	West German Sinfonia / **Joeres**	Alto Ⓢ ALC1098 (5/93R)
1993	Scala Orch / **Muti**	Sony Ⓕ SK57973 (1/95)
1994	Czech PO / **Bělohlávek**	Supraphon Ⓢ ④ SU3868-2 (8/06)
1995	Kitchener-Waterloo SO / **Armenian**	CBC Ⓜ ⊳ SMCD5145
1997	Bohemian Chbr PO / **Bostock**	Classico Ⓜ ⊳ 220535
1998	Royal Stockholm PO / **A Davis**	Finlandia Ⓕ ⊳ 2984 25327-2 (1/00)
1998	Aarhus SO / **Loughran**	Kontrapunkt Ⓕ ⊳ KON 32286
1998	SCO / **Mackerras**	Telarc Ⓕ CD80522
2005	Capella Augustina / **A Spering**	CPO Ⓕ CPO777 300-2
2006	Mahler CO / **Abbado**	DG Ⓕ 476 5786GH (7/07); Ⓢ ⑤ 479 3192GB5
2006	Philadelphia Orch / **Sawallisch**	Philadelphia Orch Ⓕ ⊳ POA1301
2010	Philharmonia Baroque Orch / **McGegan**	Philharmonia Baroque Ⓕ PBP05 (2/13)
2010	RPO / **Nowak**	Royal Philh Orch Ⓢ ⑤ RPOSP038
2010	Bamberg SO / **Ticciati**	Tudor Ⓕ SACD TUDOR7183 (1/12)
2013	Kansai PO / **Dumay**	Onyx Ⓕ ONYX4101 (1/14)
2014	Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch / **Chailly**	Decca Ⓕ 478 6775DH (5/15)
2015	Hague Residentie Orch / **de Vriend**	Challenge Classics Ⓕ SACD CC72692 (9/16)

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOBY WALES

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Galvanising: István Kertész conducts the LSO with verve and swagger in his classic recording

scherzo's shadowy lines, the hearty rhythmic kick of the finale, or especially by the St Louis Symphony's rich, singing tone. In terms of orchestral luxuriance, however, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra takes the palm. In fact, Yoel Levi's recording (1993) is a winner in every respect (nla; Telarc, 11/93). Less boisterous and boldly coloured than Kertész's, it nonetheless captures the music's exuberant spirit; one might say there's less tang and more sweetness. Best of all, every phrase is imbued with character. Note, for instance, the ungainly poise of the Menuetto or the swelling lyricism in the finale's coda.

If the success of Handley and Levi's performances was a surprise – and let's not forget Boult's debacle – then the delight provided by **Raffi Armenian**'s CBC recording (1995) may be astonishing. Let's not pretend that the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony can rival the orchestras of Atlanta or Ulster, much less the LSO. What matters is that they play their hearts out for Armenian, who does not lead them astray for a moment. Well paced, spirited, flexible and songful, this involving performance captures the essence of Brahms's Serenade as well as any.

CHAMBER AND PERIOD VERSIONS

Brahms clearly didn't want us to hear the Serenade as he initially conceived it, but that still hasn't stopped scholars from reconstructing a chamber version. Alan Boustead's adaptation for nonet has been recorded several times. Various chamber orchestras have been attracted to the Serenade not with a reconstruction of the small-orchestra version of 1859, but with the full-orchestra score as it was published and a smaller string section. The first of these was an alert and light-textured, if scrappy, interpretation by Anshel Brusilow and the Chamber Symphony of Philadelphia (1966/67 – nla; RCA, 7/68). However, Gerard Schwarz's 1983 recording is far superior (nla; Nonesuch, 2/85). Balances are odd (probably owing to the engineering), but nearly everything else is spot on. Schwarz phrases in long paragraphs and is flexible in his pacing, sometimes adding emphases that have an effect like punctuation, with commas, semicolons and exclamation marks. Quiet passages are not only soft, but also often electric. The Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra sounds lively and polished, and only occasionally in the outer movements does one miss a heftier string tone.

Dirk Joeres's genial 1992 interpretation with the West German Sinfonia makes pleasant listening, but the failure to observe Brahms's dynamics is a liability, particularly in the slow movement. **Douglas Bostock** and the Bohemian Chamber Philharmonic (1997) give a straightforward reading that tends towards the prosaic. In both cases, the strings sound overly thin – a validation, one might say, of the composer's decision to rewrite the piece for full orchestra.

The first recording of the piece on period instruments came only in 2005, via Capella Augustina under **Andreas Spering**. It's curious that an endeavour aimed at 'historically informed' performance practice should so blatantly disregard Brahms's intention to employ a full orchestra. One might accept the scrawny sound of Spering's ensemble, but not his pedestrian interpretation. A live recording from 2010 by **Nicholas McGegan** and the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra is immeasurably more imaginative but riddled with intonation problems and poor ensemble. The Hague Residentie Orchestra make some lovely, rustic sounds for **Jan Willem de Vriend** (2015), and he uses the orchestra's full string section (on modern instruments but with minimal vibrato). But as with Spering (and Ticciati, for that matter), there's an insistent rhythmic regularity that drains the music of its verve and warmth.

To hear the difference three decades make, compare Masur's mellow Leipzig recording with the recent performance by **Riccardo Chailly** (2014), who has enthusiastically embraced period practice. The Gewandhaus Orchestra still play magnificently, even if their sound is barely recognisable, with vibratoless strings and buzzing brass. Tempos are fleet, sometimes to a fault. The *Adagio* feels like a Baroque dance, and the second *scherzo* is more of a fanfare than a bucolic romp. Chailly does allow the music to breathe, but all too often it's close to panting. Sir **Charles Mackerras**, thankfully, imbues the *Adagio* with dignity in a marvellously expressive recording with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra in 1998. It's true that the string section is smallish, but the playing abounds with affection and colour, outweighing any complaints about thinness of tone. And so much detail is revealed and revelled in that one can't help but hear it with fresh ears.

There are many routes through Brahms's score, and Mackerras's – like Toscanini's and Handley's before him – is distinctively picturesque. If you're coming to this music for the first time, however, Kertész and the LSO remain the most trusted guides. G

CLASSIC CHOICE

London Symphony Orchestra / Kertész
Decca Eloquence Ⓢ ④ ELQ480 4839
Kertész brings out the music's exuberance and colour, the LSO playing with tremendous



gusto. Decca's 1967 recording has lost none of its thrilling vividness. Many listeners cut their teeth on this recording – then continue happily chewing on it.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ADRIAN SIEGEL/DECCA

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world, and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream when you want, where you want

Wigmore Hall, London & medici.tv

Sir András Schiff in concert and masterclass, May 2-3

Sir András Schiff visits London's Wigmore Hall over two consecutive days this month. First up is a solo recital of works inspired or influenced by people, performers or events; for instance Janáček's *In the Mists* was influenced by memories of his deceased daughter, while Bartók wrote his *Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm* for the English pianist Harriet Cohen. Also on the programme is music by Bach and Schumann (*Fantasie*, Op 17). Then, you can learn an awful lot about a performing artist by how they teach, so his following evening's public masterclass should offer as many insights into his own music-making as it does into how he trains the next generation.

wigmore-hall.org.uk; medici.tv; beta.medici.tv/

Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels & online

Queen Elisabeth Competition, May 8 – June 6

Those wanting to have a peek at the possible big names of the future will want to tune into the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels this month. The 2017 competition is notable for welcoming cellists for the first time ever; previously the rotating disciplines have been limited to piano, violin and voice. Finalists perform two works with the Brussels Philharmonic under Stéphane Denève, and there's a broad range of viewing options to choose from, through specialist classical streaming services Proximus, canvas.be, musiq'3.be, RTBF Culture and ARTE Concert.

qeimc.be

Herkulessaal, Munich & live on BR Klassik radio

Mariss Jansons conducts the Bavarian RSO in Schoenberg and Mozart, May 12

Mozart's Requiem is the main event of this programme, broadcast live on BR Klassik. However, in some imaginative programming, it's preceded by Schoenberg's *Survivor from Warsaw*, which seems guaranteed to add an entirely new dimension to the familiar Mozart with its harrowing concentration-camp subject matter. Mariss Jansons conducts the Choir of the BRSO, Thomas Quasthoff takes the role of the Speaker in the Schoenberg, and then the soloists for the Mozart are Genia Kühmeier, Elisabeth Kulman, Mark Padmore, and Adam Plachetka.

br-so.com; br-klassik.de

Stadthalle Göttingen & NDR Kultur

Laurence Cummings conducts International Handel Festival gala concert starring Dominique Labelle, May 13

Göttingen's International Handel Festival opens this year with a Telemann-shaped bang, Laurence Cummings conducting the Göttingen Festival Orchestra and the Canadian soprano Dominique Labelle in *Ino*, the *cantata drammatica* Telemann composed when he was 84. Telemann's Overture in D, TWV55:D17 for two trumpets and strings opens the evening, and his Conclusion in E minor TWV50:5 is slipped in before the cantata. Also on the programme are works by Handel and CPE Bach, and if you can't make it to Göttingen then NDR Kultur is recording the concert for broadcast on June 18.

haendelfestspiele.de; ndr.de

St John's Smith Square, London & BBC Radio 3

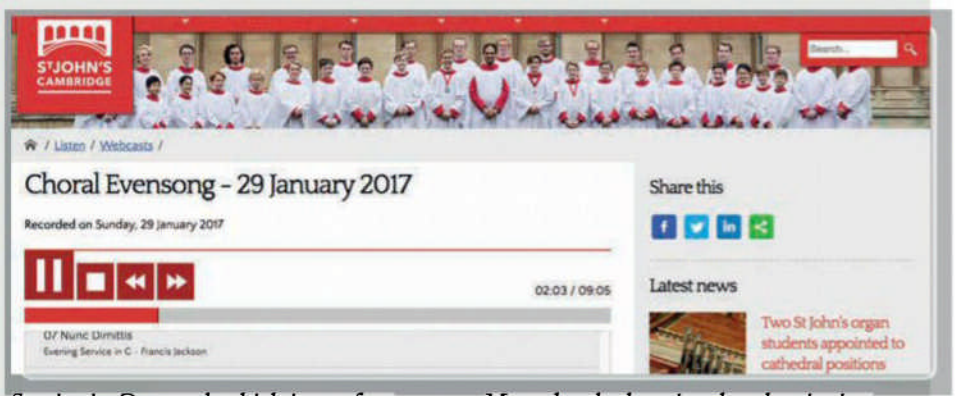
Les Passions de l'Ame at London Festival of Baroque Music, May 17

Under the artistic direction of *Gramophone*'s own Lindsay Kemp, the London Festival of Baroque Music will be broadcasting a few of its concerts on BBC Radio 3, but we want to draw your attention to the UK debut of

ONLINE MUSIC REVIEW

A wealth of choral music in the archive from St John's College, Cambridge, as all the services are available to stream

Evensong from St John's



Temporary regime-change arrived at St John's in the new year when Director of Music Andrew Nethsingha left on sabbatical and John Challenger took over in an 'acting' capacity. The choir's website archives services almost chronologically and, with a few gathering post-Christmas and plenty stacked-up from before, we can hear what a difference that change has made.

The answer, predictably, is not a lot – a testament to both men. For a slice of the choir at its glowing best listen to verses from Psalm 144 from October 30 under Nethsingha. Under Challenger, verses from Psalm 139 on January 29 have just as much clarity, polish, richness and subtlety of enunciation and blend (tone and vowels). That January 29 evensong's York theme gives us a shapely rendition of Edward Bairstow's *Lord Thou has been my refuge* and a front-footed but controlled performance of Francis Jackson's Evening Service in G, a work which is so often rushed, over-egged or both.

There's less chiselled perfection but a mighty sound in the combined evensong with Gonville & Caius College (Jan 31) in which the tricky B minor *Magnificat and Nunc dimittis* by Hugh Blair sounds secure and thrilling. Highlights from February include John Sheppard's *The Lord's Prayer* (Feb 3) and a textured performance of Balfour-Gardiner's *Evening Hymn* (Feb 4). More deeply devotional psalm singing can be heard on February 17's evensong. Persevere through the same service's slightly bumpy Evening Service in E minor by Daniel Purcell and you're rewarded with poised renditions of Byrd *Prevent us O Lord* and, as the voluntary, the 'Pastorale' from Guilmant's gorgeous Organ Sonata No 1.

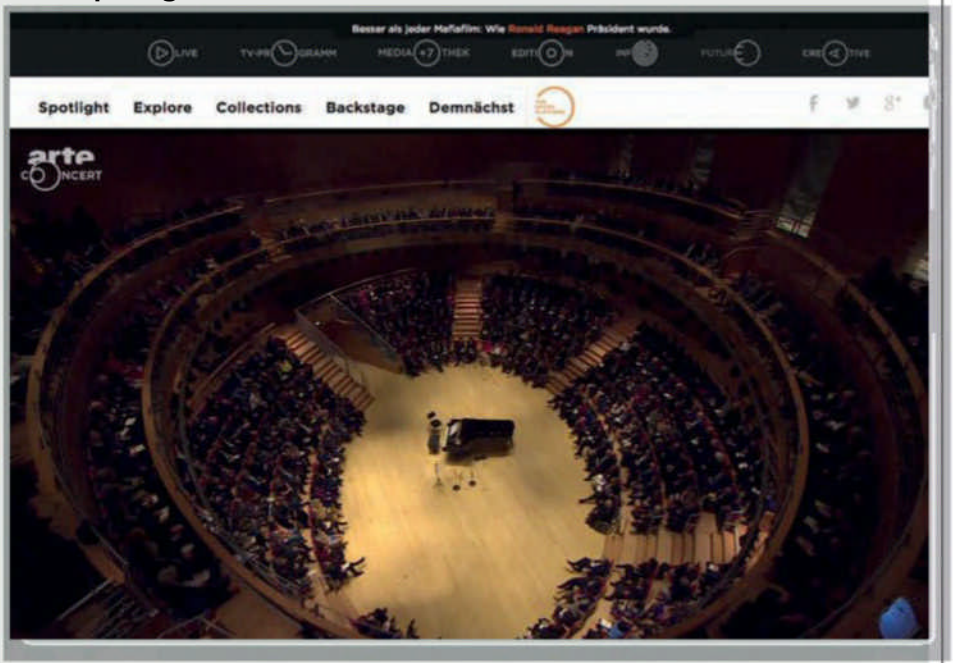
Andrew Mellor

Available to stream for free at sjcchoir.co.uk/listen/webcasts

ONLINE CONCERT REVIEW

Daniel Barenboim and friends perform at the opening of the Boulez-Saal in Berlin, a concert hall in the round

Boulez, Berg, Mozart...



According to reports from the opening of the Pierre Boulez-Saal in Berlin, the sound is in your lap. So, almost, are the musicians, not on a stage but in a space of designedly democratic proportions created by Frank Gehry. They play to each other as the audience eavesdrops. Arte's broadcast needs no recourse to aggressive spot-miking, and 360-degree filming takes full advantage of the new hall's technological possibilities.

Daniel Barenboim is the moving force behind the hall; he directs Boulez's fanfare-like *Initiale* from the upper balcony. Anna Prohaska then sings *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* with a defiant, raw beauty of which Boulez himself would have approved, as he would the flaunted absence of classical technique that may send some older listeners scurrying for their Schwarzkopf. Barenboim is a discreet foil here to Prohaska and Jörg Widmann's clarinet whereas he leads the line in an old-school account of Mozart's E flat Piano Quartet: suffused with warmth no less than the following playful and suggestive account of Berg's Chamber Concerto with his son Michael as violin soloist and Karim Said the solo pianist, reviving once more the old lines of battle drawn between trends of modernism in composition and performance during the second half of the last century. 'I don't want a ghetto for contemporary music,' was Barenboim's sincere if ingenuous recent declaration, 'like I don't want a ghetto for Baroque. I don't like ghettos. I'm Jewish; it's not my thing.'

With his airy impatience for notions of historically informed performance, Barenboim has taken the general's baton from Boulez. Bringing together players from his Staatskapelle Berlin and West-Eastern Divan orchestras, he directs the new Boulez Ensemble in *Sur Incises*, the composer's late and sensuously Impressionist nonet for harps, pianos and percussion. Lucid if not precise, high-powered yet falling short of the London Sinfonietta's brilliance in this repertoire, the performance nonetheless makes a happy close to a concert full of promise for the future of music in Berlin.

Peter Quantrill

Available to stream for free at http://concert.arte.tv/de/eroeffnungskonzert-pierre-boulez-saal-berlin until June 5.

the young Swiss ensemble, Les Passions de l'Ame. Directed by violinist Meret Lüthi, they are bringing a programme of works by Biber, Schmelzer, Fux and Walther, demonstrating the imagination and quirkiness of Austrian and Bohemian string-ensemble repertoire, as well as its fascination with music of the nearby Ottoman Empire. This concert will then be broadcast on BBC Radio 3's *The Early Music Show* on May 28.

lfbm.org.uk; bbc.co.uk/radio3

Trinity Church, Wall Street, New York & online

Novus NY perform John Luther Adams's Become Ocean, May 18

Novus NY is the contemporary music orchestra of Trinity Church, Wall Street, established in 2011 by Trinity Church's Artistic Director, composer-conductor Julian Wachner. This webcast lunchtime concert, part of the church's Sunken Cathedral series and conducted by Wachner, conveniently falls at the end of the European working day (EST 1pm/BST 6pm), and it's a strong programme. First there's John Luther Adams's Pulitzer Prize-winning Seattle Symphony commission, *Become Ocean*. Then comes the world premiere of a new work by Jessica Meyer, and finally Luna Pearl Wolfe's *After the Wave*.

trinitywallstreet.org

Halle aux Grains, Toulouse, medici.tv & Radio Classique

One Thousand and One Nights of Musicians, with Tugan Sokhiev, May 19

Under the baton of their music director, Tugan Sokhiev, the Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse presents an especially sumptuous-sounding programme of Orient-inspired musical works from all over the world. The French box is ticked by Ravel's *Shéhérazade*, sung by the rising French mezzo Marianne Crebassa, who last year signed an exclusive recording contract with Erato. Also on the programme is Nielsen's *Aladdin*, Stravinsky's ballet, *The Firebird*, and Strauss's 'Dance of the Seven Veils' from *Salome*.

onct.toulouse.fr; medici.tv; beta.medici.tv; francemusique.fr

Montreal Symphony House, Quebec & medici.tv

Kent Nagano conducts multimedia New World Symphony, May 31

The opening sentence to this entry should read, 'And now for something completely different...', because this one really is quite unusual, and certainly worth logging on for some remote viewing if you don't happen to be residing in Canada. The Montreal Symphony Orchestra and its music director Kent Nagano have collaborated with the young Canadian composer Samy Moussa, recipient of the 2017 Hindemith Prize (won last year by Anna Clyne), and the multimedia entertainment studio Moment Factory, to create a new work celebrating the 375th anniversary of Montreal. If you do a quick online search for 'Moment Factory', you'll get a flavour of the sorts of spectacular visuals they're expert at, and why we think this is definitely one to catch. Plus, for those who need some core repertoire too, Dvořák's *New World* Symphony is also on the programme.

osm.ca; medici.tv; beta.medici.tv



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A very impressive piece of digital electronics.
Alan Sircom, Editor-in-Chief, Hi-Fi+

There are certainly people who want more than Roon offers in terms of extended metadata. For these people, 3beez has you covered. I spent some very enjoyable time listening to this very good sounding yet relatively modest system. Very nice!
Michael Lavorgna, Editor-in-Chief, AudioStream

I showed Wax to some of my friends who use JRiver/Amarra/Roon, etc. and they couldn't believe it could be done so elegantly and so beautifully, and yet remain so simple. It revolutionizes classical music metadata input.
Jonathan Yung, Writer, HiFi Review

The most sophisticated music management software on the planet. Navigating this thankfully uncluttered main user interface is thoroughly intuitive for even the most tentative computer client. The integration of a streaming source was seamless. Moreover, the system does sound terrific — no question as to its high end creds.
Andrew Quint, Sr. Writer, The Absolute Sound

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THIS MONTH high quality sound on the go from Cambridge Audio, a new DAC from Oppo Sonica and what hi-fi manufacturers can learn from how Tesla updates its cars' software **Andrew Everard, Audio Editor**

Not just a new product but a whole new range

The latest arrivals see some interesting developments and an acclaimed German range making its UK debut



One of the talking points of the recent Sound and Vision show, held for the 30th time in Bristol, was the arrival of a new range – well, new to the UK – under the distributorship of speaker company PMC. Already the UK home of Canada's Bryston, PMC is now distributing German brand AVM to the British market and, based on the evidence of the initial demonstrations given with the PMC twenty25 speakers, the new electronics seem to be a rather good fit.

Based in Malsch, AVM has been in business for 30 years, most recently under current owner and MD Udo Besser, who explains that simplicity of design is the key to the brand: 'We do not develop unnecessarily complicated circuits that need a lot of compensating components in order to function correctly. We prefer a simple, straight circuit design where every component has its own clearly defined task.'

Three ranges make up the AVM offering: Inspiration, Evolution and the flagship Ovation, with pre-, power and integrated amplifiers, CD players, network players, CD-receivers and all-in-one CD/network music/amplifier units 1. The Inspiration range is anchored by the £3995 CS 2.2, a compact streaming CD receiver delivering 2x165W, while at the top of the Ovation range is the massive SA 8.2 stereo power amp (£11,495).

3 SOUND UNITED

Following on from last month's Audio Essay comments about the influence of Amazon's Alexa voice-command system, Yamaha has announced that from later this year its MusicCast multiroom system will gain Alexa integration 2, allowing its products to be voice-controlled. A firmware update will be rolled out for all 40 products in the range, along with an Alexa 'skill' containing voice commands for MusicCast. There's more on this new world of software and the way it's changing products in this month's Audio Essay (see page 126).



Another almost inevitable change in the audio landscape is the ongoing round of mergers and acquisitions, and one of the latest is a big one. D+M Group, the parent of Denon, HEOS, Marantz and Boston Acoustics, has been acquired by Sound United, the US company behind brands such as Definitive Technology and Polk Audio. A huge change 3? Well, not quite as big as it looks at first glance: after all, D+M Group was formed when a US-based investment group took over Denon and Marantz, so really all we're seeing here is a financial transaction – along with all the usual talk about leveraging synergies and the like.

Back on British soil, the new speakers from Acoustic Energy 4 are active versions of the company's classic AE1 design, complete with two 50W amplifiers in each enclosure. Designed to be used with streamer/DAC/pre-amps such as the Oppo Sonica DAC reviewed overleaf, the speakers use a 27mm metal dome tweeter and 12.5cm ceramic/aluminium mid/bass unit, and have both RCA phono and XLR inputs. They stand just 30cm tall and sell for £1000/pr in piano black or white, or £200 more in piano lacquered cherry veneer. Optional stands are £350/pr or can be bought in a package with the speakers at £1200 or £1400, depending on finish. G

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MAY TEST DISCS



A delicate and refined recording from Reference Recordings' Fresh! label, 'Viva Segovia!' has both a crisp, clean view of the solo guitar and a realistic sense of ambience and intimacy.



This box-set of the organ music of Kenneth Leighton is a major project for Resonus and it sounds consistently magnificent, with fine weight and detail.

REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Oppo Sonica DAC

The new DAC, from a company best known for its Blu-ray players and headphones, has more to it than meets the eye

Now we are firmly in what is often referred to as the 'computer music' age, those who've made – or are thinking of making – the switch from physical formats such as CDs to files stored on a computer are likely to be looking for a means of making the connection between Mac or PC and audio system.

The usual choice is a four-way one: you can use a digital-to-analogue converter (or DAC) with a USB input designed to connect directly the computer; you can buy a device able to play music from USB storage, which you load using the computer; you can stream directly from computer to a hi-fi device using a wireless system such as Bluetooth or Apple's AirPlay; or you can make the content available on your home network and use a dedicated network player – if, that is, you can work out which model offers you the features you require.

Or you can give up on the whole thing as too much faff and just content yourself with playing music from a streaming service such as Spotify or Tidal – and with that many options available, who would blame you?

Chinese company Oppo thinks it may have the solution, which will come as no surprise to those who have followed its ever-expanding range. This is a company that started out making phones almost 20 years ago, but is perhaps best known outside its home country for its video disc players – first DVD and more recently Blu-ray – and, in recent years, a range of high-quality headphones and amplifiers to drive them. Its debut in the 'personal audio' market was the highly impressive PM-1 planar magnetic headphone model and the partnering HA-1 headphone amplifier/DAC, but for a while now its disc players have been known not just for their 'universal' capabilities, allowing them to play just about anything on a 12cm disc, but also for their superior video and audio quality, the latter even extending to built-in network streaming.

With that context in mind, perhaps the new Sonica DAC, selling for £799, shouldn't come as that much of a surprise. Here we have, packed into one relatively compact unit, a high-quality DAC able to play anything up to ultra-high-resolution PCM and DSD formats from a computer via USB; an Apple AirPlay/Bluetooth receiver for wireless connection of portable audio devices and computers; a player for music on USB storage devices such as hard drives and thumbdrives; and also a network player able to play music stored on home servers or computers, as well as internet radio or streaming services, with a choice of Wi-Fi or cabled networking. Oh, and it also has a built-in pre-amplifier feeding both conventional RCA phono outputs and balanced XLRs, and so can be used either directly into power amplifiers or powered/active speakers or at fixed line level into a standard amplifier or pre-amp. As if that weren't enough, it can also interface with the other products in the new Oppo Sonica line, which are wireless multiroom



OPPO SONICA DAC

Type Digital-to-analogue converter/pre-amplifier/network player
Price £799
Inputs Optical/coaxial digital, one line stereo, USB Type B for computer, USB Type A for storage devices, Ethernet networking, Apple AirPlay, Bluetooth
Outputs Line audio on RCA phonos and balanced XLRs, with fixed or variable level
Other connections 12V trigger in/out
Formats played PCM to 768kHz/32 bit and DSD 22.4MHz/DSD512 via USB from computer; PCM to 192kHz/24 bit and DSD2.8MHz/DSD64; DLNA playback varies according to server software
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speakers: via a dedicated app, available for both Android and iOS phones and tablets, the DAC can become another zone of a wireless music system or share music it's playing with other Sonica zones.

With all that functionality for the money, you might expect the audio side of things would be similarly functional but nothing more. However, experience of previous products from the company makes it clear that 'adequate' isn't the Oppo way. Instead, the designers manage to combine top-notch components with good audio design practice, consistently making products that perform beyond their price, as is the case with both the Blu-ray players and the excellent HA-1 headphone amplifier.

In this case, the design extends to the use of the highly respected ESS ES9038PRO 32-bit HyperStream DAC: the top model in the chip-maker's Sabre Pro range, it allows the Sonica DAC to handle PCM up to 768kHz/32 bit and DSD up to 22.5792 MHz (DSD512) – at least via the asynchronous USB computer audio input, which allows the internal clock to take charge of the digital stream. In other words, the Sonica DAC is pretty much future-proofed in the digital formats department.

Power for the unit is provided by a hefty toroidal transformer for low noise and minimal electrical interference, and the audio layout is fully balanced all the way from the output of the DAC through to the audio outputs, with the conventional unbalanced RCA phono outputs only being converted from this balanced feed at the last moment in the output stage. Again this is a noise-reduction strategy.

Aside from the wireless inputs – Wi-Fi, Bluetooth and Apple AirPlay – and its asynchronous USB connection for computers and USB host socket for storage devices, the Sonica DAC also has optical and coaxial digital inputs, and a single analogue input on RCA phonos. Using that last one, even an analogue source, including a turntable via a suitable phono pre-amp, can be digitised and shared with Sonica wireless speakers. Completing the connectivity are 12V trigger in/out sockets, for example to enable a suitable power amplifier to be switched on and off by the DAC.

PERFORMANCE

I remember being very pleasantly surprised by the performance of Oppo's HA-1 headphone amplifier when used as a DAC/pre-amp (7/14), so it should hardly be a surprise that the Sonica DAC, despite being less than two-thirds of the price of that unit, is an exceptional performer for the money. And that's as true whether it's used as a 'computer DAC' or a complete network audio solution: even when used straight into some very high-end power amplifiers I happened to have to hand during the review period it impressed with its clarity and power, not to mention the sheer detail resolution on offer.

Indeed, even when used in 'Bypass' mode, disabling the volume control to allow the Sonica to be used into a conventional amplifier, the unit more than justifies its price shorn of its pre-amp functionality. Yes, you need to have a phone or tablet to use it, but that's the case with just about any network-capable player, and after all the entry-level for a suitable Android tablet is now comfortably under £100, even if you were to buy one purely to act as a remote control for the Oppo.

Playing the Dudamel/Simón Bolívar SO recording of Beethoven's Ninth in 96kHz/24 bit, fed from my MacMini, the Oppo displays excellent detail in a deep, expansive but well-focused sound stage: instrumental timbres are well resolved, as is the sense of the presence of the large orchestral forces, and even in the climactic last movement there's still good insight into what's going on, rather than simply a wash of sound, the headlong rush to the 'finishing post' showing the excellent rhythmic acuity on tap.

Switch to the more relaxed, intimate recording of solo guitar works played by Roberto Moronn Pérez on his 'Viva Segovia!' album, released recently on the Fresh! label from Reference Recordings, and the crisp, precise presentation gives an almost luminous quality to the sound of the guitar, allowing the attack and decay of every note to be heard. It's a wonderfully revealing sound, with fine body to the instrument and yet superb definition, and the Oppo is just as impressive with solo voices, chamber ensembles and across its range of inputs, so the same sound quality is maintained whether you are playing music straight from the computer or streaming it over the home network from a computer or NAS drive.

The sum-up? The Sonica DAC is a remarkable device for the money, encompassing just about every computer music need in one simple package. Yet again Oppo shows it can take on the best-known names in audio and come up with something special. G

Or you could try...

The Oppo has a remarkable specification and superb performance for the price but it's hardly alone in this market sector

Marantz NA6005



For around £300 you can find the Marantz NA6005, the company's most affordable network player: it's not in the first flush of youth but has a lot to offer at this bargain price, and would be perfect for anyone wanting to dip a toe into streaming. See more at **marantz.co.uk**.

Cambridge CXN



The Cambridge CXN is part of the company's 'streamlined' CX range, which is its mainstream audio line-up. In a more conventional 'full-width' package than the Oppo, not only can it play network and internet content but it also has an asynchronous USB input to allow a computer to be connected for direct playback. For details see **cambridgeaudio.com**.

Naim NAC-N 272



With its Uniti series, Naim was one of the first companies to popularise the whole idea of music streamed over a home network. Since then it has developed its range of ND- network players for use in conventional systems. The NAC-N 272 combines that expertise with the Salisbury company's acclaimed pre-amplifier technology to create a highly accomplished front end for a Naim system – not to mention keeping the box-count down. See **naimaudio.com**.

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REVIEW CAMBRIDGE AUDIO YOYO (M)

Yoyo for sounds on the go

This high-quality wireless speaker system's classic design twist and excellent sound set it apart from the pack

Bluetooth is everywhere: the ability to connect wirelessly from a smartphone or tablet to all kinds of audio devices has clearly caught the public imagination. Thus you can send music to headphones, amplifiers and systems and even your car – oh, and to any one of a huge range of speakers and speaker systems, whether you're at home or out and about.

Bluetooth speakers can be small enough to fit in your hand or take up minimal space on your desk, can hang on your backpack and even shrug off the odd dunking – making them ideal for those with an active lifestyle – while some models can even be daisy-chained together, so that a group of friends can share their music around all their devices. Party, anyone?

In a world of 'me too' Bluetooth speakers, these Yoyos have a definite Britishness about them

There's only one problem with many of the Bluetooth speakers on the market – they're not terribly good. The combination of low-power amplifiers and tiny drive units, crammed into frankly rather plasticky housings, means the sound is usually everything that description of the specification would suggest: thin, a bit tinny, and with heavy processing designed to give the impression of bass where there is none.

So, given that you can pick up a Bluetooth speaker for £10 – yes, really – it's clear any company asking you to pay £300 for the same kind of product needs to offer something a bit special to justify the price tag. Fortunately, London-based Cambridge Audio not only has form when it comes to making good-sounding wireless speakers; it also has behind it the experience gained with its range of high-performing hi-fi separates, not to mention the other brands under the 'umbrella' of parent company Audio Partnership.

The catchily-named Yoyo range comprises three models, designated (S), (M) and (L). The small and large models are sold as single speakers, with left, right and bass speakers built in, while the (M) we have here is a more conventional stereo pair of speakers, complete with Bluetooth connectivity, and both 3.5mm line input and USB charging for portable devices on each speaker.

Under the skin, the two-way design uses a full range driver and subwoofer in each enclosure, while power is supplied by a built-in rechargeable battery, good for up to 24 hours of use, and a range of plug adaptors are provided for travel use. But what's most likely to catch the eye is the woven wrap on the speakers: made for Cambridge Audio by Yorkshire fabric manufacturer Marton Mills, the 100 per cent worsted wool material is designed to be acoustically transparent and is treated to repel dirt, water and wear.

The speakers are available in dark grey, light grey and blue, and have an understated, high-quality style. In a world of 'me too' Bluetooth speakers, with all kinds of outlandish shapes and designs clamouring for the buyer's attention, these compact Yoyo models – they stand just over 20cm tall and are 12.5cm wide and deep – have a definite Britishness about them.

PERFORMANCE

Using the Yoyo (M) is simple: touch controls atop each speaker allow you to access main functions from either enclosure, while 'gesture control' allows the user to start or pause playback with a swipe of the fingers. There's also a built-in speakerphone function to allow you to talk on your smartphone while cooking or gardening or whatever – or, in my case, chat and type at the same time.

However, the most attractive feature here is that these are truly wireless speakers. Once charged and connected via Bluetooth, they just sit on your desk delivering the music – with realistic-sounding stereo imaging and sound staging, but without any cables in sight. Yes, their main appeal is to those carrying their music around with them, but I found them just as well suited to being parked either side of my computer monitor on my desk, while they also served me very well as a companion to my laptop in my hotel room while attending a recent hi-fi show.

There's something quite comforting about being able to relax after a tough day with Radio 3 in rather good sound quality: usually my computer speakers or a pair of compact headphones suffice but the Yoyo experience was on a different level, delivering *Rusalka* live from the Met with a surprisingly room-filling sound. Yes, the speakers benefited from a spot of boundary reinforcement from the wall against which the desk was placed, but the bass was both well-integrated with the smooth treble and midrange on offer, and entirely unforced – which is more than you can say for many a wireless speaker design.

Also impressive – though maybe not if you're in the next hotel room! – is that the Yoyos can deliver plenty of level when required, with volume controlled either from the touch-buttons on the top panels or the device to which the speakers are connected. Even better is that the power on hand means they could even be a viable 'only speakers' option for use in modest-sized living rooms or student bedrooms, with the side benefit that they can be taken out and about, or around the building, as required.

Style, simplicity, fine sound and some clever features: the Cambridge Audio Yoyo (M) is a very well-sorted little speaker system. G



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO YOYO (M)

Type Bluetooth speaker system
Connections Bluetooth, 3.5mm audio, USB for charging portable devices
Drivers One full-range and one subwoofer in each speaker
Power Built-in rechargeable batteries, up to 24hrs' use, with charger
Finishes Light grey, dark grey, blue woven wool wrap
Dimensions (HxWxD) 20.4x12.5x12.5cm
Weight 3kg/pr
cambridgeaudio.com

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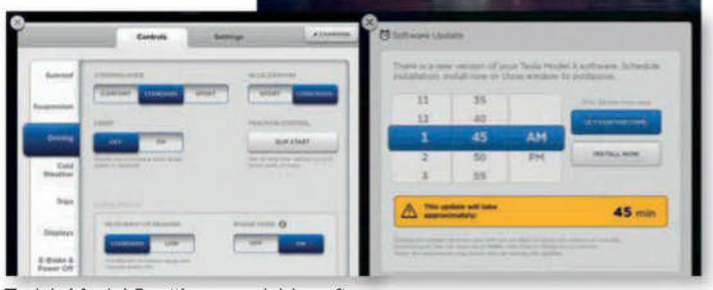
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ESSAY

When will hi-fi offer an easily implementable 'ludicrous mode'?

The pace of software development continues apace and it's opening up even more fascinating possibilities





Tesla's Model S, with upgradable software

Personally, I blame – or should it be thank? – Tesla. No, not the inventor/physicist, nor even the similarly-named but apparently unrelated factory in the Czech Republic where the people behind the Pro-ject brand rediscovered the turntables at the core of their business, but the car company.

You see, quite apart from showing the world that electric cars could be both viable in terms of range and also fun in both styling and performance, Elon Musk's automotive company has opened the car industry's eyes to the novel concept of buying a car, and then upgrading its abilities using simple software downloads. You pay, it instals, and suddenly you have a different car, with an effect not unlike taking your family hatchback to the dealer and having a bigger engine dropped in, along with some new features added along the way. So you can start with a standard car with more than adequate performance, and then (albeit with some hardware upgrades) work your way up to what the company calls 'Ludicrous Mode' – itself a step up from 'Insane Mode'.

Meanwhile, what the company describes as 'regular over-the-air updates' will add features such as 'autopilot' assistance, full self-driving capability, enhanced media players (for when you are being driven by the car) and so on. No need to buy a new car – which is handy when prices currently start at somewhere north of £60,000 – but rather you can upgrade the one you already have as new ideas and facilities become available.

That thought was running through my mind the other week when I was sitting in a briefing for a forthcoming product due to be launched this autumn, given under an embargo. I seem to be going to a lot of events like this of late, with manufacturers willing to explain, and show prototypes of, new products and concepts in return for a 'signature of silence' on a piece of paper. They're handy for us scribblers when it comes to planning future coverage in print magazines with their long lead-times, albeit risky for the company concerned if a journalist attending decides the value of an online exclusive is greater than the consequences of breaking the embargo – usually 'blacklisting' by the company in question.

Anyway, what brought to mind the 'Tesla effect' was the description of a range of very advanced functions in a particular product, and the comment that they wouldn't be available at initial launch, 'but will be coming along later'. 'In a Mk2 version next year?' someone asked, to which the answer was that no, it was expected these advanced elements of functionality would be rolled out at some point after the introduction of the product via a firmware update.

> It's possible now to add on features not even thought about when the product first appeared

That's significant for two reasons: one is that the planned improvement will take what looks like it's already going to be a very advanced product and turn it into something pretty much unprecendented, while the other is that this marks a shift in thinking about the usual incremental generational improvements we're all so used to in the world of hi-fi and beyond. After all, many will be used to that slightly sickening feeling when you get home with your new pride and joy and read days later that a new, improved version is on the way, and if you'd only waited a little longer…

Well, it seems that now, provided sufficient hardware capability is built in at the outset, not to mention the processing power required, it's possible to add on features not even thought about when the product first appeared. The consumer is happy, the manufacturer looks like a jolly nice one, and all's well with the world.

Of course, such upgrade potential needs careful handling if consumer expectations are to be managed. I well remember the furore when a TV manufacturer said its set was capable of some functionality via a firmware update, and then failed to deliver that upgrade. That one got very messy, as it can when you depend on a third-party supplier to deliver features or content – ask owners of the Nook tablet, sold as an alternative to Amazon's Kindle, who now find their products no longer updating after the brand was sold off.

Then again, think how pleased you must be if you bought into Yamaha's excellent MusicCast multiroom system and now discover – as reported on page 121 – that your devices will gain Alexa voice-operation later this year. It's something you would never have expected when you bought the product, and yet now it's going to be bang up to date with the latest, most talked-about technology.

Maybe that's the way we're going; and while there's no mention of an additional charge for the Yamaha Alexa integration, I can easily see hi-fi companies seeking a way to monetise these improvements by offering a new model as a platform on to which chargeable upgrades can add features. If you want extra functions beyond what you initially bought, you pay to add them – much more sensible than consigning your product to landfill and buying a new one.

Now, which will be the first hi-fi manufacturer to offer an easily implementable 'click, pay and download' ludicrous mode? G

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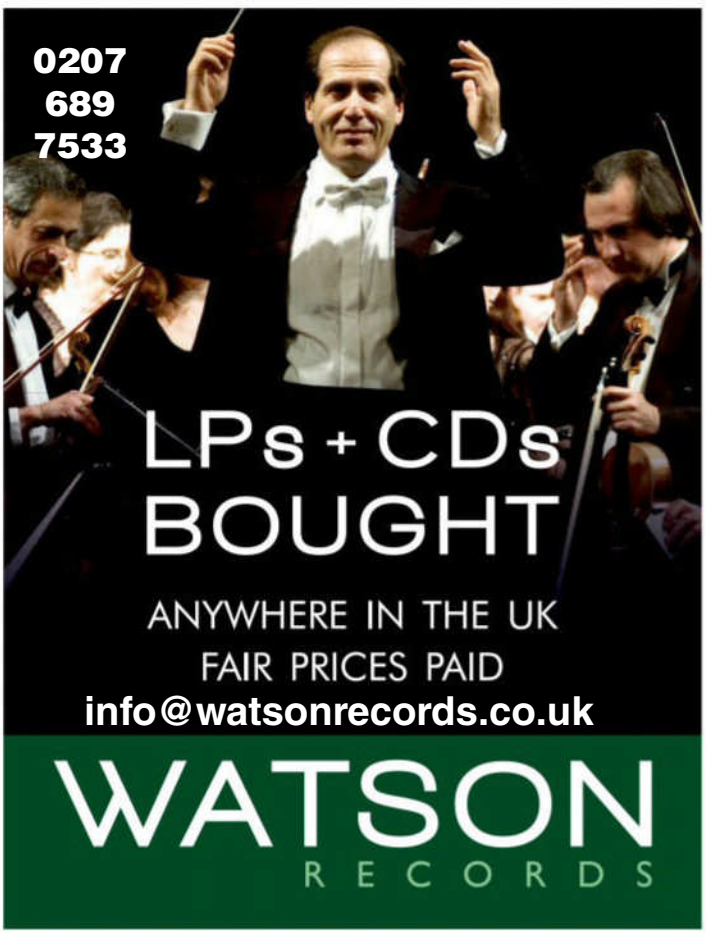
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Stokowski, Varèse's champion

In his article on Edgard Varèse's *Amériques* (Collection, March, page 106) Philip Clark rather curiously refers to Leopold Stokowski as a 'cult conductor' and claims that persuading him to perform the work 'represented a triumph in itself'. In fact, Stokowski needed no persuading at all, as he was the foremost champion of the living composer at that time, something the *New York Times* was later to recognise when it calculated that he'd given around 2000 'first performances' during his 60-year conducting career. These not only included *Amériques* but also the world premieres of Varèse's *Intégrales* on March 1, 1925, and *Arcana* on April 8, 1927.

As to Varèse's complaint, quoted by Philip Clark, that Stokowski 'hasn't answered my letter', I can do no better than quote from Oliver Daniel's 1982 Stokowski biography: 'Stoki did answer and explained that he had sailed for Europe earlier than he expected and that he would work on Varèse's score at the earliest possible moment.' When he did finally premiere *Amériques* there was a veritable riot and vehement boos and hisses from the outraged audience. In addition, the hostile response from the critics was summed up by one of them thus: 'Mr Stokowski could scarcely have done anything more detrimental to the cause of modern music than to produce a composition like *Amériques*.'

Edward Johnson
London W11



Championing Varèse: conductor Leopold Stokowski

Letter of the Month

The bond between Gedda and Klemperer



Nicolai Gedda seated (left), Christa Ludwig singing and Otto Klemperer conducting Bach's St Matthew Passion

In the recent obituary of Nicolai Gedda (April, page 147), I was surprised to find no mention of his professional association with Otto Klemperer. There was considerable mutual respect and even affection between the two men. Gedda sang in Klemperer's *Messiah*, Bach's B minor Mass and two of his finest Mozart recordings, *Die Zauberflöte* and *Don Giovanni*. He wrote the introduction to *Klemperer Stories* (Osborne and Thomson: 1980) in which he expressed his 'greatest admiration' for 'that great old man', for whom he 'felt a strong sympathy' from their very first meeting. Gedda observed that Klemperer's sense of humour 'sprang from a deep sense of irony, and informed his entire character and personality', and was also well known for the affectionate and accurate impersonation of Klemperer he would give in private at recording sessions.

In 1967, when Klemperer's 85th birthday concert at the Royal Festival Hall, of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, was being planned, the conductor asked Gedda personally to take part. Gedda was certain that the conductor would not live to conduct it, but he readily agreed 'because I love him so much and I'm touched that he should ask me'. As it happens, I was present at that celebratory concert on May 14, 1970. Sadly, Gedda had come down with a heavy cold, but was replaced by Richard Lewis.

Keith Pearce
Penzance, Cornwall

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PRESTO CLASSICAL

Praising Petrenko's Pathétique

Having been a reader of *Gramophone* since 1979, this is the first time I have found myself compelled to write you. It is in praise of the final CD in a new set of Tchaikovsky symphonies from the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Vasily Petrenko ('Recording of the Month', March, page 24). There is so much to admire here and in the set as a whole – I was especially taken by the absolutely gorgeous account of the First Symphony (8/16), now crowned by a stunning *Pathétique*.

Your reviewer Mark Pullinger says: 'I commend Vasily Petrenko's as the finest modern cycle of Tchaikovsky's symphonies currently available.' Now, I don't want to open a can of worms here but for me it is currently the finest complete set (and I have heard them all).

Well done to the RLPO and to Vasily Petrenko for a set I will cherish for many years to come.

Jeff Fullstone
Pontypridd, South Wales

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Women rule for Danny Driver

Were they here to savour the moment, I can only imagine Amy Beach, Cécile Chaminade and Dorothy Howell revelling in Hyperion's latest Romantic Piano Concerto release – Volume 70, no less – of their *concertante* works, brilliantly played by the indefatigable Danny Driver with outstanding support from the BBC Scottish Symphony conducted by Rebecca Miller (reviewed in May, page 29). It seems quite astonishing that Driver's first appearance in this series was back in 2008, with very fine accounts of the York Bowen Third and Fourth Concertos (11/09), so this latest foray, long overdue, is most welcome.

The Howell was completely unfamiliar to me; it seems highly unlikely that it will ever receive stronger advocacy than it does here. Surely this is an attractive enough work to have warranted much broader exposure over the years, but at least it can now boast a state-of-the-art recording by committed artists of the highest calibre. And while I might have missed it, I haven't come across a new recording of the lovely Chaminade *Concertstück* since the heyday of LP. But the centrepiece of this disc is unquestionably the Beach Concerto, a virtuosic work of considerable substance and awash in glorious tunes. While it has enjoyed a few recordings over the years, none can remotely claim the artistic merits of this newcomer, which will doubtless win it many new fans.

Hyperion is to be commended for choosing to celebrate International Women's Day with a release of rarely heard music by three female composers, and the team of Driver and Miller for the heartfelt advocacy evident in every note. This is surely one of the most laudable releases in this much-vaunted piano series since its launch just over a quarter-century ago.

David Kennedy
Toronto, Canada

Goldberg conundrum

It is well known that each of the *Goldberg Variations* is in the key of either G major or G minor. However, much as I've been enthusiastic about this masterpiece, I wasn't aware of the D major (or minor) on which every variation's section A settles toward its end. All section Bs then conclude without exception by returning to the key of G. This has got me wondering, would this possibly be Bach's wordplay on 'Goldberg'? A Google search led me nowhere. I only started paying special attention to this matter after having practised the piece for some time, and I would be fascinated to read a *Gramophone* Specialist's Guide on this peculiar phenomenon of wordplay in musical compositions by one of your knowledgeable reviewers.

Yifei Zhu, via email

OBITUARIES

A CBSO Principal Conductor and Karajan's Concertmaster

LOUIS FRÉMAUX

Conductor
Born August 13, 1921
Died March 20, 2017



Frémaux is best known as Simon Rattle's predecessor at the helm of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (1969-78). During his time there he made a number of fine recordings for EMI (including French music as well as discs of John McCabe and William Walton), though relations with the players deteriorated. He studied at the Paris Conservatoire and then worked with the Monte Carlo Orchestra and the Orchestre Philharmonique Rhône-Alpes (later the Orchestre National de Lyon). Following his Birmingham period, he headed the Sydney SO (1979-82).

THOMAS BRANDIS

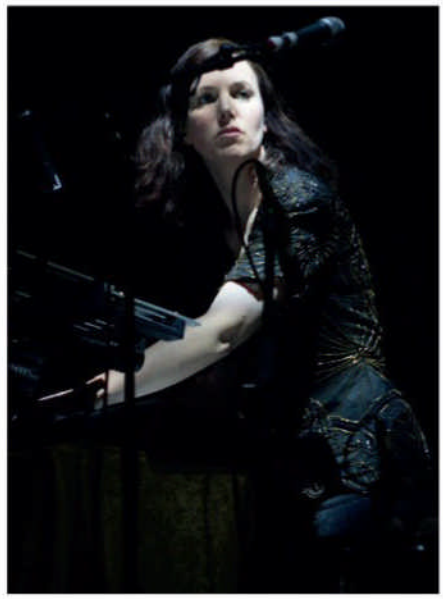
Violinist
Born June 23, 1935
Died March 30, 2017



After study in Hamburg, where he was born, and in London (with Max Rostal), Brandis was a member of the Berlin Philharmonic from 1962 to 1983, during which time he held the post of First Concertmaster. Brandis also founded his own quartet in 1976 (which recorded extensively for Nimbus, among other labels). He can be heard on many of Karajan's recordings, including, as soloist, Mozart's *Haffner* Serenade, Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra* and various Baroque concertos. After his retirement, he taught in Berlin, with visiting posts in London and Lübeck.

NEXT MONTH

JUNE 2017



Crossing musical borders: composer Anna Meredith

Where classical music meets...

In a wide-ranging exploration, Kate Molleson looks at the borders between classical music and other genres. Are they more porous than before, and how does that affect the way musicians work, and the way we listen?

Hall of Fame

The votes are in...we reveal which figures from classical recording's history our readers have chosen to admit to the Gramophone Hall of Fame this year

Walton's Belshazzar's Feast

Andrew Mellor listens to recordings of Walton's dramatic cantata and reveals his favourites

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Carole Boyd



The actress and star of BBC Radio 4's The Archers on how words and music relate – not least in William Walton's Façade

I grew up with radio – I listened to everything as a child, Dick Barton, *Children's Hour* and all those wonderful plays, and along with that came a lot of incidental music. The plays on *Children's Hour* would use wonderful classical pieces which as a youngster I didn't know. But when I was about 10 years old the BBC was transmitting a serial called *The Eagle of the Ninth* by Rosemary Sutcliff, and the music was so thrilling – so I telephoned the BBC, and they said it was by someone called William Walton. It was his First Symphony – trumpets and drums and exciting moments. And when I started learning the piano and came across *Façade* I thought, 'Oh goodness, it's the same man!' I then started to phone the BBC for all the music that caught my ear. They also did a dramatised version of *Great Expectations*, and I loved the music in that, which they said was *The Mayor of Casterbridge* by Vaughan Williams. I don't think I've ever heard it since, but it was my first entry into that wonderful pastoral area of English music.

There was a lot of music at my convent prep school – aged five we were all playing percussion, and in the school choir we entered all the local competitions and we always won. We had a wonderful teacher who was ex-D'Oyly Carte, who went around looking rather like the Queen Mother. After an aural test she immediately wrote to my mother and said, 'I think your daughter might have perfect pitch and I want to give her lessons.' But my mother said, 'she's already having piano lessons, the 11-plus isn't far away, there isn't money for both and she's going to have too much on her plate and not achieve anything.' So I carried on with the piano, but the singing was always there. We had a very echoey kitchen at the back of the house with a stone floor and stone walls, and so I used to stand in there and sing. I knew some of the tunes from operatic arias, but of course I didn't know the words as they were in Italian, so I used to make it up. The lady next door used to say to my mother, 'Carole's got this wonderful voice, when is she going on the stage?' and my mother said, 'never!' But little did they know!

A lot of the time, recording *Façade* was absolutely terrifying. I'd done two or three of the numbers with a piano duo, the Bibby Sisters, because it's also arranged for four hands. But when it came to doing 'the real thing', as it were, and working with the producer Andrew Keener, who knows about these things, we came to realise how much more detailed work was required than we'd thought. We were no longer actors, we were no longer voices, we were actually instruments. We all have our own instrument, which is our voice, but suddenly we're having to play it with musicians, as members of an orchestra, and it was a huge leap.



THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

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Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau; Gerald Moore
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It is so exquisite, and for me it distills music and everything I feel about music.

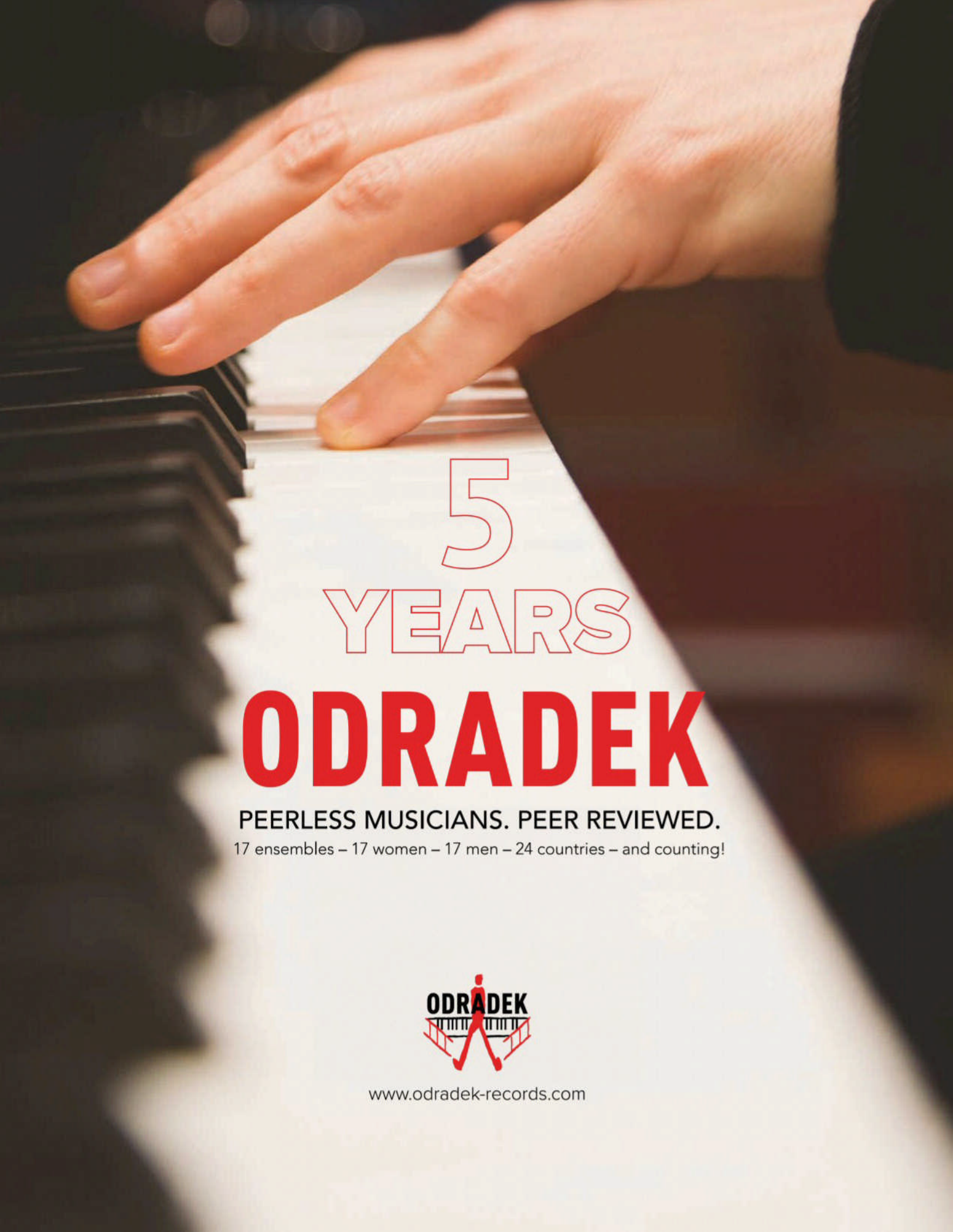
There's so much in this music. Every time I found something new, and I found in Edith Sitwell's imagination, her character, the depths and the layers, so much more than I had previously realised. It's from an incredible period of history – the upheaval in the world, in Europe particularly, and the upheaval in art and music and so on and so forth, is all reflected in *Façade*, under this apparently sweet, frivolous, rather shallow piece of music. But it's not really shallow at all, it's very clever and listening just to the musicians playing their bits when we weren't speaking, just listening to the orchestration, it is so fabulous, so delicate.

Some years ago Humphrey Carpenter was playing something on *Listeners' Choice* someone had requested. All I knew was that it was Schubert, and it was one of his Lieder. I didn't know much about Schubert Lieder and couldn't see quite what all the fuss was about until I heard this: 'Du bist die Ruh'. And then of course I couldn't get enough Lieder, and that's been going on until today.

And do you know a poem by Walter de la Mare called *Music*? It's just very short, and the line that I would have to take to my desert island, as I'm a words and music person, would have to be: 'When music sounds, all that I was, I am / Ere to this haunt of brooding dust I came'. G

Walton's Façade, on Orchid Classics, will be reviewed next issue

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